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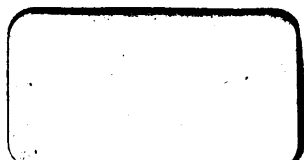
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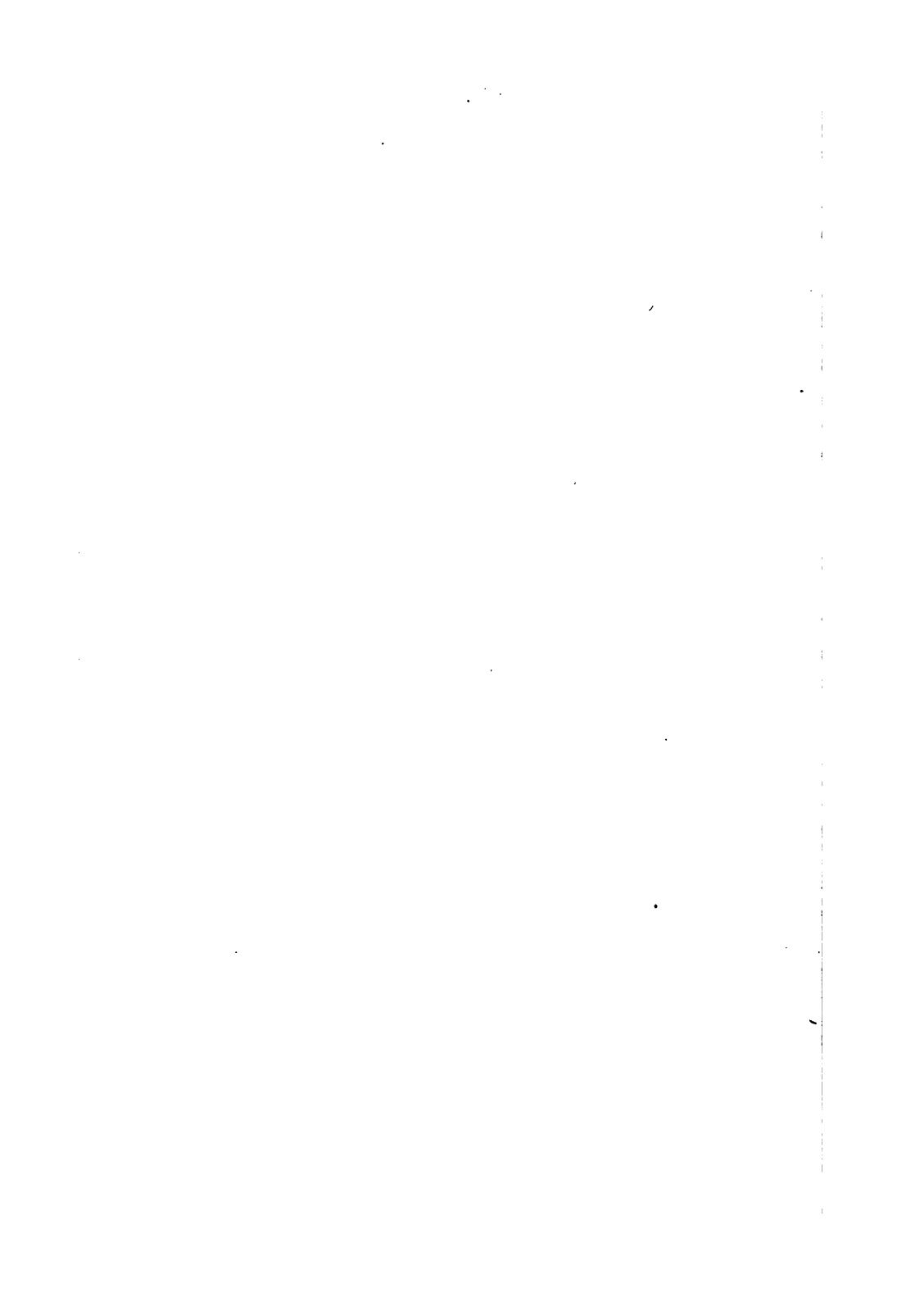
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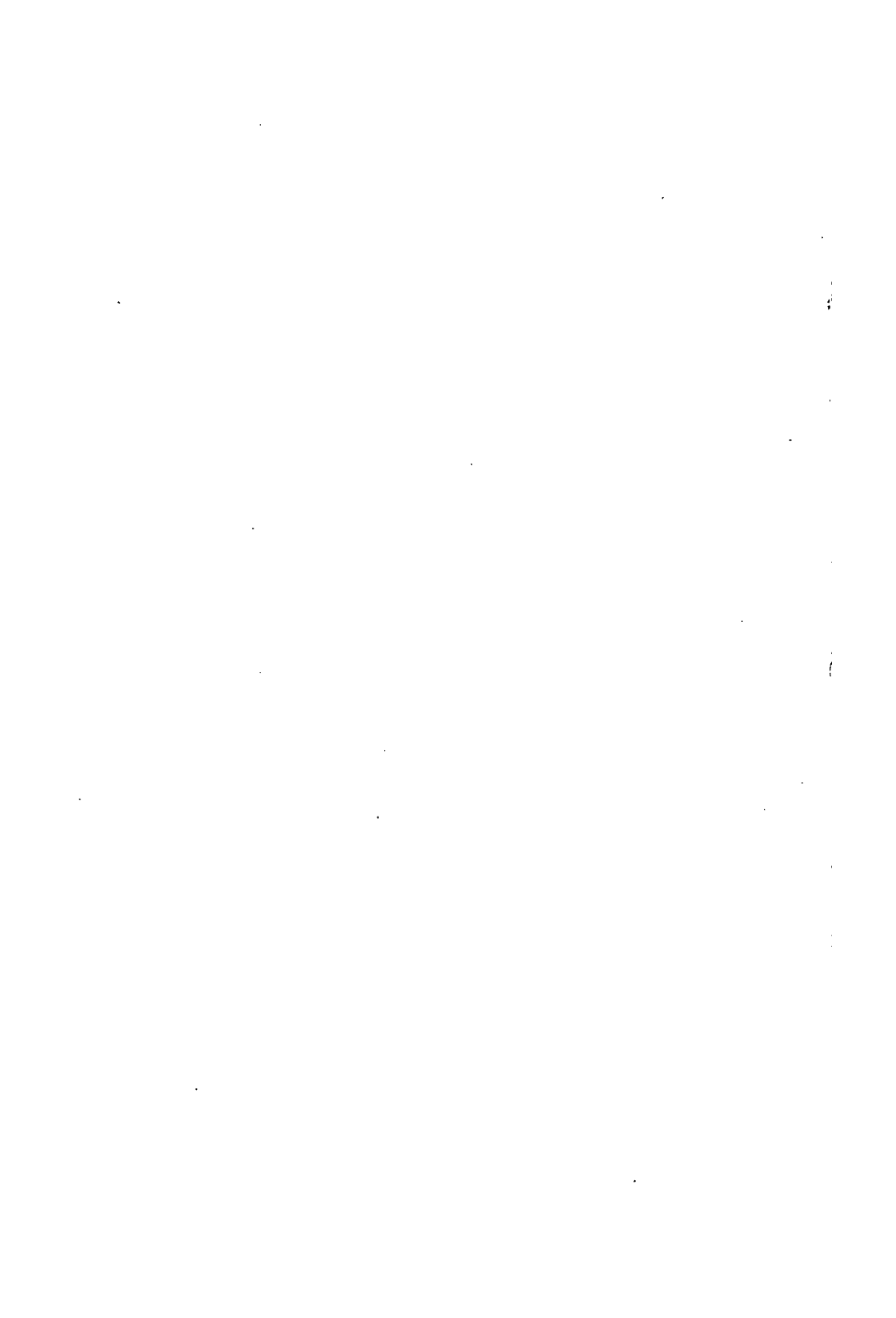


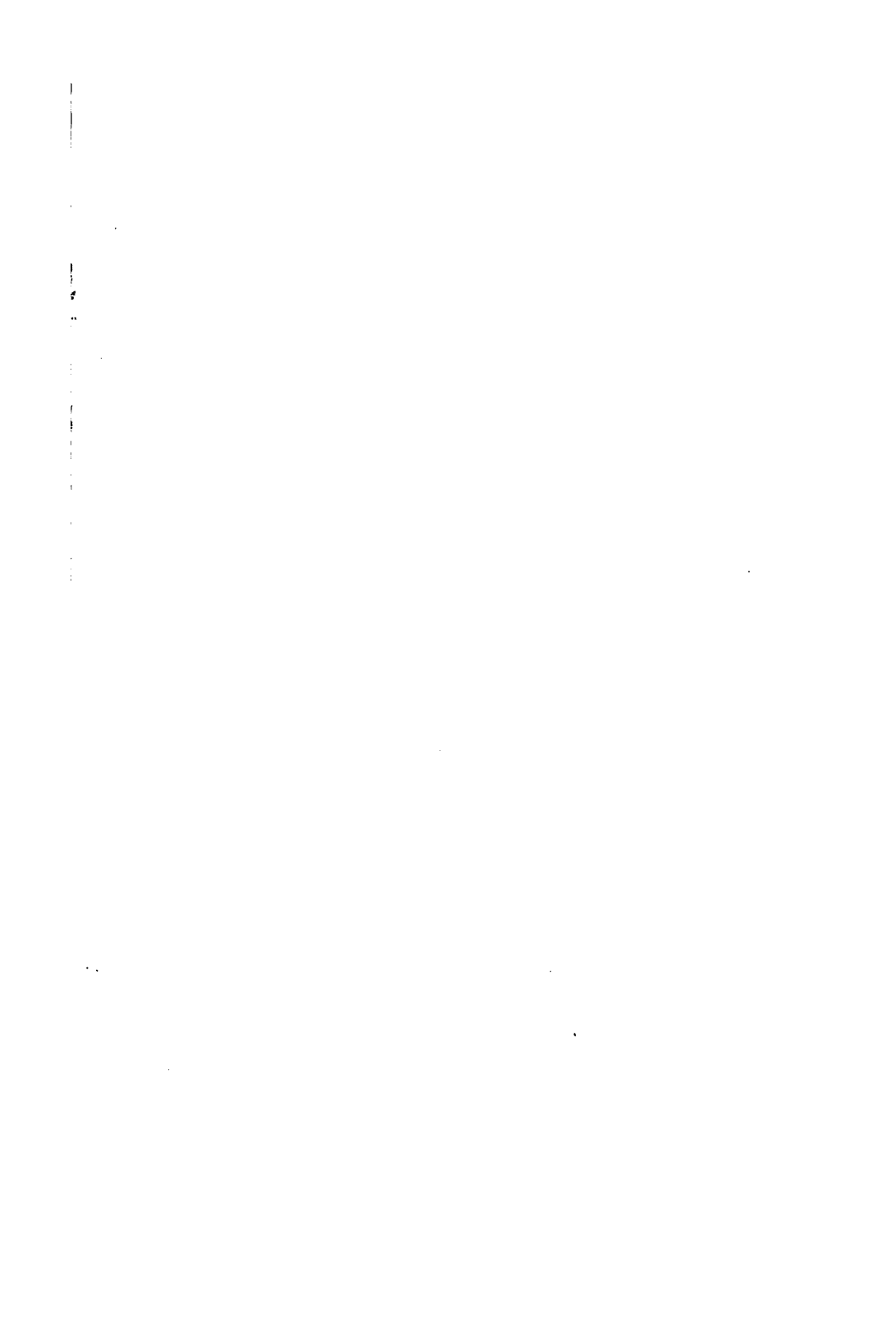
Bob Lawrence.



TITO

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TITO

By WILLIAM HENRY CARSON

Author of
"HESTER BLAIR" and "THE FOOL"

Illustrations by
C HARLES H. STEPHENS

C. M. Clark
Publishing
Company

Boston, Mass.
U. S. A.
1903.





"TITO"

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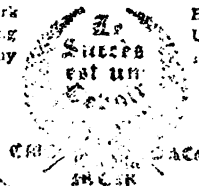
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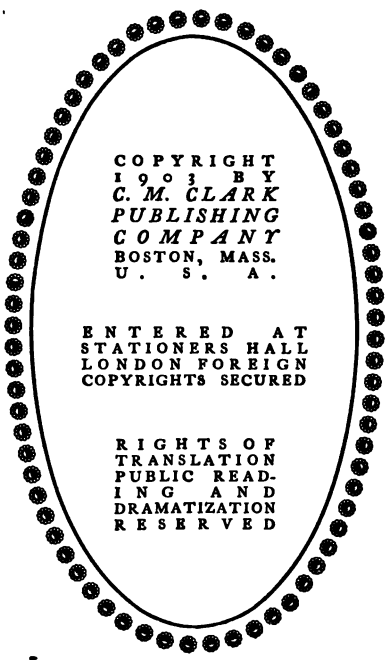
A STORY OF
"HESTER BLAIR" AND "THE FOOL"

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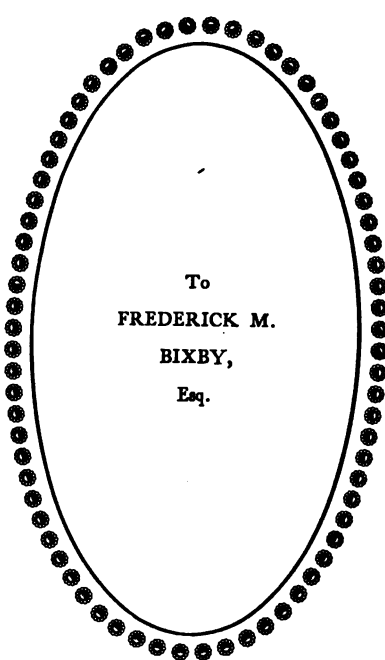




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TITO.

CHAPTER I.

THE quiet of early evening had settled over the city of Florence. In the valley the first shadows were enveloping the river Arno, but on the distant tower of the *Palazzo Vecchio* the sunlight still lingered—a golden flood that, slowly mounting to the top, touched the apex caressingly, as though loath to remove its crown from so noble a work. The slanting beams turned the sky into mountains of bronze, to melt quickly away as the sun dipped behind the distant hills. Flashed heavenward, the last rays of light sank to the line of the horizon—in their wake a canopy of flame fringed with purple, that, as if weary of its own splendor, followed, with languid grace, the receding light. It was already night in the valley.

Mother Malenotti stood before the open door of the Vanburg Villa, situated some miles from the city. She had an air of alertness, expectancy, and, after a moment's hesitation, noiselessly closed the door and returned to the dining room.

"No word from him yet and it is now three days

TITO

since I sent the telegram. Bah! what does he care! He will be glad to be rid of her; and she—my Bettina! she will die.”

A flood of emotions swept over her features—love for Bettina, the young wife who, after giving birth to a son, lay unconscious, dying, in the adjoining room; hate for the absent husband and father, for having stolen the love that the old woman claimed.

“*Madonna Mia*, why did he ever enter our lives?”

Her voice shook with emotion, but it was the passion of hate, not of sorrow, that moved her. Cautiously she looked into the adjoining room at the sleeper, who lay quite still, her breathing the only sign of life; then turned to face Pietro, her foster brother, who had just entered.

“Well?” she queried.

Her glance was eager, questioning; her attitude that of suppressed excitement.

Pietro responded with a nod of his head.

A gleam of vicious joy flashed the intelligence that she understood; then her features resumed their habitual expression—unrelenting, forbidding.

“You have heard nothing from him yet?” Pietro asked.

“No. Perhaps he has gone to America. It was only a question of time till he deserted her. Now she is dying—”

A savage love, tempered by a sorrow that was pathetic, shone in the eyes she turned to the taci-

TITO

turn Pietro, as if to wring from him some expression of sympathy, of hope; but after meeting her look in sullen silence, his eyes fell.

A low forehead, bleary eyes, restless with suspicion, bloodless lips compressed tightly over irregular, yellow teeth, dark swarthy skin, and a croppy, thin beard that accentuated his expression of dogged determination and calculating cruelty—such was Pietro as he sat glaring at the floor. But it was a scar, blood red, extending from the lobe of the left ear to the mouth, like a whip-lash, standing out on the cheek with repulsive prominence, that added a hideousness to a face that was cruel, revolting. One glance was sufficient, and you turned away, shuddering. His life had been one of vindictive passion, hate guided by superstition:—the goal of his desires, vengeance; the only redeeming instinct in his nature, his love for his niece, Bettina. Since her marriage to Horace Vanburg he had not seen her. Two days before, he had come quickly in answer to the command of his foster sister, Mother Malenotti,—a command that filled him with terror when he learned the cause—a command that aroused every evil instinct in his nature.

“And the child?” The old woman’s voice was tremulous.

“Hush!” he exclaimed.

He did not look up for, conscious of his own ugliness, it was only in moments of passion that he met the eyes of those who addressed him.

“He has had his joy,” he muttered, “his sorrow

TITO

is yet to come. If she dies, then will he make his reckoning with the *Cristo*—and me."

Pietro's lips parted in a vicious smile, showing his yellow teeth, but it was like the snarl of a wild beast.

"Sorrow? *Diavolo!* You cannot reach his heart. These *Americani* are without hearts. What know they of love? Has the rich father ever sent for our Bettina? No. Has he ever called her daughter? No. He was too proud to acknowledge her; and, after the marriage, when we went to America, did not our Bettina wait day after day for word from the father bidding her come to him? And each day the look of sorrow in her eyes deepened—I could read it there. But the husband had but excuses to give her, bidding her wait, while her heart was bursting with shame. Do you hear, Pietro? She was not good enough for these rich *Americani!* Not good enough—our Bettina!" Rage seemed to choke her utterance, and she paused, breathless. The scar on Pietro's face turned to a dull purple hue.

"Angiolina," his tone was one of fierce intensity, "do you see this scar?" He raised a finger trembling with passion to his face. The old woman remained silent.

"He who gave me that is dead," he continued. "Would you know how death came to him?" His smile added venom to his words.

The old woman raised her hand in a deprecating gesture.

"All we had this *Americano* stole from us, and

TITO

it has left a scar deeper than that,—do you hear? deeper.”

“Be quiet,” she commanded, “what is the good of this? It will not save her.”

Pietro relapsed into his customary sullen silence; the old woman busied herself about her duties.

Two years before our story opens, began the love romance of Horace Vanburg and Bettina Turelli. He, a descendant of a family who could trace their ancestors to the earliest Dutch settlers of Manhattan Island, young, rich in his own right, an amateur artist of uncommon ability, was loitering through Europe and Northern Africa. Now in Algiers, a man of wealth and leisure, disappearing in a night to become the guest of French officers on the frontier, bivouacking in the desert, tearing across country, the wildest of wild riders, skirting the coast in an open boat, the companion of native fishermen, daring fate through the mountain passes of Sicily, avoiding much travelled routes and the English hotels of Cairo to consort with natives, and run the risk of having his throat cut. Of a day dallying along the shores of the Nile, to be next heard from at Rome—disappearing as suddenly to sketch in the most southerly parts of Italy—living with the peasants, passing for an Italian, French, German or American as occasion demanded and his progress or affairs were advanced—the languages of continental Europe were to him as his native tongue. He had earned his holiday by a brilliant record at college—his

TITO

daring and dash while at school, being repeated in his wild journeyings: seeking the least known and obscure byways of Southern Europe and the adjacent continent, fearless, restless, peril only adding zest to his travels.

He had first met Bettina at one of the Florentine galleries. From the first meeting her beauty had attracted him, for it was of an uncommon type, rarely found in one of her class. She lived with her aunt, Mother Malenotti, whose love for the beautiful, talented girl was such as one of her race and position in life knows—wild, jealous, idolatrous. The old woman and Pietro worshiped at a shrine—Bettina was their goddess.

The aunt and Pietro worked in the fields, slaving, pinching, denying themselves almost the necessities of life, that the young Bettina might be taught, that she might have the best of food, of clothing—for her future was all that was left to them; and they watched over her as a tigress guards her young. When on a holiday they rested from their labors, they would sit beside the young artist, watch her in silent adoration, and marvel at her beauty, and her wonderful skill, as the portrait of the Madonna grew on the canvas. Then with a sigh of satisfaction they would return to the fields, blessing the saints that had been kind to them.

Vanburg and Bettina had spent one long summer together, copying in the galleries, sketching in the valley of the Arno, happy with their art and their love until, in the early autumn, he had asked Mother Malenotti's consent to their marriage.

TITO

He was met by a tirade of invectives, upbraidings, even curses, for having come into their lives. Why should he, a rich aristocrat, wish to marry a peasant's daughter? No, she would never consent. He would make of Bettina a plaything, a pastime, and when he was tired of her, fling her from him, back into her old life—disgraced, dishonored. Vanburg resorted to every art to win her favor. Time, however, only increased the old woman's wrath; but notwithstanding her opposition, in the late autumn they were quietly married.

A cablegram, followed by a letter, informed his father of his marriage, but to these came no reply, and Vanburg determined to visit America in the hope that his father would become reconciled. Mother Malenotti accompanied them. Though she made no effort to disguise her enmity toward Vanburg, her devotion to the young wife was complete, and he met her vindictive thrusts with calm courtesy that only enraged her the more.

"If you would hate me less," he said to her, "it would add to Bettina's happiness."

An ominous flash of the eyes was her answer.

"Why do you hate me?" he insisted. "Bettina is happy."

"She was happy before you came."

"True," he rejoined, "but she is not less happy now."

"Not now, but—"

Her glance of suspicion flashed her meaning.

"Try to hate me less. It would add to your own comfort, besides it makes Bettina miserable."

TITO

"What of the rich father?" she demanded, fiercely. "He has not sent for my Bettina. Why? Yes, to America I will go with thee that I may be near my Bettina—for she will return here as she goes—without the blessing that is her right. Dost thou think I do not know? Yes, yes, I will go, that I may curse thee for having brought this shame to her. And thy wife! When she knows what I know will she not cry her heart out—but she will speak no word, for that is her way. Yes, I will go, I will go—to be near her."

Vanburg winced. The old woman voiced his own fears.

Their arrival in America was, so far as his father was concerned, a realization of all that Mother Malenotti had prophesied—the father refused to acknowledge his son's marriage. Only once did Vanburg visit his home. He received a formal greeting, but no mention was made of his wife; and he read in the set expression, the unresponsive features, the calm, unflinching gaze, that should he ever return he must come alone.

Bettina met him with a startled, expectant look; but she read in his face what she most feared.

"Love, let us return to our own *Italia*. Shall we go soon?"

"Yes," he answered.

The old woman said nothing, but the young husband could not meet her glance that flashed with jubilant, vicious joy.

Returning to Florence, Vanburg rented a villa on an eminence overlooking the city. Here they

TITO

lived for nearly two years, Bettina's love for her husband, and the sunshine of her native land, filling her life to completeness.

Then came the hurried departure of Vanburg for Paris and Brussels on business connected with his property interests; the premature birth of their child; the telegram, directed to his bankers at Paris, where it had lain uncalled for until he had returned from Brussels after an absence of two days.

And now Bettina was dying; and the young husband, grief-stricken, was rushing south, his heart sickening at the thought that he might not be in time.

CHAPTER II.

IN intelligence and education Mother Malenotti was far above the ordinary peasant, for she came of a family of some degree of affluence; but in early life she was left to fight the battle with poverty. She was forced to perform the most menial labor, to provide for her younger sister—Bettina's mother—insisting that she maintain, in a degree, the modest gentility to which she had been accustomed. But the marriage of her sister to a poor artist wholly embittered her life, and after the death of Bettina's mother, the only influence to soften the old woman's hate was the young child, who gave promise of great beauty. Her artist instinct Bettina inherited from her father, but her desire to be taught was at first frowned upon. Her marked ability, however, overcame her aunt's bitter opposition, and she received such instruction as the old woman, assisted by Pietro, could procure. It was when the work of the young artist had begun to attract attention, when the hopes of the aunt and Pietro seemed about to be realized, that Vanburg first met Bettina.

When Vanburg had asked their consent to his marriage their rage was beyond bound. Again was disappointment to enter their lives, again were they called upon to surrender all hope, all ambi-

TITO

tion; nothing remained but the memory of their years of toil—bitterness for the loss of their Bettina, hate for the man who had won her love.

Dr. Remo had just left Bettina's bedside. He was plainly nervous, and refused to meet the old woman's questioning glance. Divining his fears, she regarded him with pitying disdain.

"Bah!" she exclaimed in a tone of disgust, "thou wert not always a coward. I can remember when fear did not so easily move thee."

"Hush!" he ejaculated.

"The child was born dead. That you know! for were we not here alone?"

"Enough," he said, "I will come later in the night. She cannot last till morning. Before the end comes she may again recover consciousness."

He went out, followed to the door by the old woman.

"The coward!" she muttered when she was alone, "but he dare not speak. He has skill, but the devil guides it. Have I assisted him these years for naught? He cannot stay in the country,—he must not. After he has gone there will be no one but Pietro." She chuckled. "Another child of the devil! but they can wring nothing from him! Revenge is what sweetens his life, but he must wait—his knife will not grow dull—nor rust. It is I—I, who shall wring the heart of him who stole her from me. My Bettina!"

Her voice choked. With the cry of a wild animal, she stood motionless—her hands clenched

TITO

in suppressed rage, her eyes smouldering with hate.

"Aye, Pietro, thou angel with the devil's soul, thy turn shall come when I have tortured him. When he feels what I now feel, when he lives to curse his own child—then, good Pietro, will I turn him over to thee for a final reckoning. Thy vengeance would be too sure, too swift; mine, ah!" a devilish smile momentarily dissolved the wrinkles, "mine is the slow torture—like the point of a pin in the flesh that lies close to the heart. And I shall ask him of the rich father who would not acknowledge his wife. And his son shall grow to hate him, to curse his father,—his own flesh and blood." Again the laugh, again the distorted features;—a tirade of mutterings, threats, curses and prayers intermingling. A silence followed—the old woman's mind lost in the receding years.

Rising, she prepared for the night, arranging everything skilfully and with systematic precision. She moved about with the soft, trained step of one long accustomed to illness, for she had been for years a mid-wife, and it was while acting in that capacity that she had obtained knowledge which now forced Dr. Remo, without question or comment, to do her bidding.

It was nearly dawn when the doctor returned, and together they went into the sick chamber.

Almost immediately, a quick, springing step echoed on the board walk, and Vanburg hurriedly entered the dining room.

Horace Vanburg was not what is termed distin-

TITO

guished in appearance, neither was he handsome. Yet he would attract a second glance either of admiration or respect. It was not his face that appealed to one or commanded attention:—it was his closely knit figure, his massive shoulders, the well trained muscles, formidable under the light clothing that covered them, that stamped him as the born and trained athlete. His face was clean shaven, and he possessed no distinctive feature that might be called attractive; but an open frankness of expression, eyes that looked squarely at you, never wavering—fearless, sturdy and independent manhood was stamped on face and form. But he possessed one distinctive characteristic, a trait that for generations had marked the Van-burgs—a proud poise of the head, which was thrown back, giving to him an air of hauteur, almost of insolence; but this was the physical insignia of his race. True, he came of a family who reckoned pride a heritage that was theirs as of right, but his mind and his heart and his tastes were as simple as those of an untutored child. Physically he was as nearly perfect as man attains. Only at college sports had he ever tested his strength and endurance—gifts which he was almost unconscious of possessing. He was the sort of man in whom men confide, he was of that order of gentlemen who can command the love of woman.

CHAPTER III.

A GLANCE at the faces of Mother Malenotti and her companion was all that was needed to confirm Vanburg's fears. It was not for one of his race to betray emotion; his features were as though hewn from stone, impenetrable,—a blank; and his seeming lack of feeling, either of concern or grief, the old woman attributed to a want of affection for the young wife.

"Bettina!" Vanburg's voice was husky. He addressed Mother Malenotti, whose eyes were fixed upon his face as if to measure, in anticipation, the effect of her answer.

"She is very low. Three days ago the child was born before its time. It was born dead. *Madonna*, my Bettina! She will die!"

She wrung her hands, moaning with noisy grief, until a warning glance from Dr. Remo caused her to desist. From her eyes, half hidden under her drooping eyelids, shot a glance to note the effect of what she said,—a look searching, penetrating,—a look which proclaimed her inhuman disregard for the feelings of the man who listened. He stood silent, motionless, then turned to Doctor Remo.

"Is what she says true?"

"Yes." The answer came with hesitation. The

TITO

doctor continued falteringly: "With the exception of a few moments she has been unconscious. She is slowly sinking. Before the end she may recover consciousness, but I fear she cannot last till morning."

Vanburg did not reply. He entered his wife's room and softly closed the door.

"What did I tell thee!" said Mother Malenotti, when they were alone. "He is glad—glad that his wife is dying. He thinks only of the joy of being rid of her. Is it not as I have said? And when I spoke of the child as dead did I not see the joy in his eyes? Yes, yes, the honeymoon is over! While it lasted the passion lived; after, he must look for a new plaything. Ah! the sweet *Americani*, the sweet, gentle, rich *Ameri—Diavolo!* the swine! the——"

Her companion held up a warning finger. The old woman ceased speaking, but her face, distorted with passion, the muscles twitching, her eyes flashing her hate, was horrible to see.

Hers was not the blind, furious, unreasoning hate of one whose mind is a mixture of chieldishness and brutish passions. She was endowed with the instincts of the refined criminal, cold, calculating, her reasoning logical, though the process might be crude, carrying out her schemes with a boldness that augured well for success—her greatest danger the possibility that her unreasoning hate might balk her own efforts. Her one pure instinct was her love for her niece. The husband's wealth could not influence her, and a look, a word,

TITO

a caress from Bettina brought with it joy she would not have bartered for all the riches of her own Florence. In her love for the young wife she was pathetic, tender; in her intense hatred of Vanburg, she was demoniacal.

Vanburg sat by his dying wife. No outward sign betrayed the agony that he felt, but at times a faint groan, quickly stifled, voiced his sorrow. It was a sorrow that struck at his heart, his hope, his life, but it was voiceless. Tears were not for him—his was a great, silent, immeasurable grief that wrings the heart dry: it was such grief as touches the very essence of the soul.

"Bettina, love! Bettina, Bettina, my wife!"

Though he spoke in a whisper, a shudder seemed to sweep over her; then her breathing, for an instant irregular, became almost imperceptible, and again she lay quite still.

The pallor of approaching death, though relieved by the delicate tint of brown on her cheek, only accentuated her beauty. Her hair, of a dark chestnut hue, fell in wavy masses on the pillow; her hands, which lay outside the coverlet, were of marvelous whiteness. Every line of her features proclaimed the artist, and were as those of a goddess in marble—the purity of their exquisite curves rivaling the works of art in the *Galleria degli Uffizi*. But it was when she again moved, her eyelids slowly uplifting, her glance one of intelligence, when she recognized her husband, that one caught a glimpse of the tenderness of the young wife. Her dark hazel eyes, the long black lashes slowly

TITO

lifting, a veil to soften their lustre, seemed to disclose the portals of her soul—their expression that of a wondering child.

"Horace, my love." Her voice died to a breath.

"Bettina, darling."

"Ah! I am so glad—you came. They—have told—"

"Rest, Bettina love," he said, touching her lips lightly in a caress, "they have told me."

"If the child had lived—"

"Do not mourn, my own, think now only of thyself."

"I think only of thee, *Amore Mio*, how lonely—"

"Hush, Bettina, wife, hush. Do not exhaust thyself."

Often, in his short life, had he heedlessly faced death without a tremor; but as he leaned over his young wife until his breath fanned her cheek, it was only by a command made perfect by years of self repression that he controlled his voice, his emotions. It was not for the Vanburgs to betray their feelings. You might wring their hearts, but conjecture as to the measure of their suffering would be the only reward.

"Horace," her tone weak, faltering, "let me hear thy voice. Tell me—what I know—so well, that you love me."

"I never realized till now how well, my own. But I need not tell thee. Never has a doubt come between us. My love was so great! If the thought ever came that I might lose thee, I trem-

TITO

bled, love, with dread, with fear. Ah, the happiness I have known with thee—”

He dare not trust his voice further. She sighed in an ecstasy of delight: her eyelids quivered, closed, and again it seemed as if consciousness had left her.

In the adjoining room Mother Malenotti, her passion threatening to overcome her, disregarding her companion's warning was saying:

“I will not be quiet! Will I not say it to him when she is gone? Aye, that I will—and more. And he shall listen. Dost thou hear? With all his dirty wealth will he listen! And she might have married one of her own countrymen, for she had many lovers. And now, now she must die! Why do you not go and look at her? You coward! You stand there shaking with fear—fear! Of what? Fool! Go to her and see if you can turn your devil's skill to any use.”

She flashed a look of disgust at him as he entered the sick room.

After the doctor's cursory examination, Vanburg's questioning glance was answered by a shake of the head. Bettina moved uneasily and, with a slight movement of her hand, motioned the Doctor to withdraw.

“I will call you if you are needed,” Vanburg said.

When they were alone, Bettina, with an effort, turned her head so that she might see her husband's face. He drew nearer, for her voice had sunk to a whisper.

TITO

"I have so much to say,—so much. Aunt Malenotti—"

"Do not distress thyself, my love, I shall see that everything is done for your aunt. Is there nothing I can do for thee, my Bettina?"

"Yes," she sighed, "remember me, love."

A smile lingered on her features, but it was as faint as the shadow of a moonbeam. She made an effort to press the hand that held hers, but her fingers were powerless. Her glance, resting on her husband's face, was one of pathetic, lingering tenderness. She loved, as those of her nationality love, intensely, passionately, but subdued and controlled by her finer instincts, and a nature at once refined and lofty in her high ideal of life. The happiness of her married life had been complete.

Vanburg bent his head to hear the words that formed on Bettina's lips—words she was powerless to utter.

The dull light of early morning was touching the peaks of the distant Apennines—a shroud of gray descending to the valley. It settled over the heart and the life of Horace Vanburg. Bettina's lips moved in a last effort.

"Horace—my own love."

That was all. Fate had laid a heavy hand on the man who sat motionless, stricken with a sorrow that leaves heart and mind barren of feeling—the past glowing with the brilliancy of an autumn sunset,—the light of a great love; the future—

CHAPTER IV.

A WEEK later Mother Malenotti and Vanburg were alone in the house, that he was visiting for the last time. After Bettina's death he had lodged at a hotel in the city, for the loneliness of his home oppressed him; and his final visit was for the purpose of turning over the costly furnishings to the old woman, and to make provision for her future.

Handling the bric-a-brac, weighing each piece of silverware in her hand, speculating the while as to its worth, she listened to Vanburg while he told her it was hers to do with as she wished, her avarice filling him with disgust. But when he offered to settle upon her a competency, hate shone from the eyes she turned to him. She had enough for the few years that were left her—should she require more, there was Pietro. No, she would accept no money; she was alone, her needs were few—if necessary she would work in the fields—and she resumed her mental estimates of the worth of her new belongings. Vanburg left her standing in the centre of the room, her noisy grief ceasing as he was about to depart, that she might flash at him a look of unutterable hate. Death had not softened her, and, had curses the power the lowly mind attributes to them, he might, in the future,

TITO

well believe the fates had listened to her maledictions.

Through the window she watched his retreating figure; then, shaking her clenched fist at him as he disappeared, her cackling laugh sent little thrills of uncanny echoes through the deserted house.

"You shall suffer, by the blood of the *Cristo* shall you be made to feel such pain as only a father may know. We, of Italia, never forgive! You stole from me the life and the love of Bettina—all I had, all I lived for! But you have yet to pay the cost—the cost of a life agony! And the good God grant to you a long life, that you may live to hear your own flesh and blood curse you, ay, as I do now. Will that not wring your pride—your heart? And you will then know that I, Angiolina Malenotti, have not forgotten!"

Again the laugh, the distorted features, the muttered oaths;—dying into exclamations of covetous joy, of greed, as she gloatingly surveyed the tapestries and paintings.

All this was hers, and from the proceeds of the sale would come a bit of land, a cottage, and indifferent luxury for the rest of her days. She would sell it all—all but a memento of the dead Bettina, and taking from an easel a portrait of the *Madonna*, the last work of the artist wife, she looked at it long and lovingly. It was a copy of Lippi's famous painting, finished only a few days before Bettina's marriage,—her name and Van-burg's entwined in the right hand corner of the unframed canvas. This she would keep to remind

TITO

her daily of the young girl for whom she had slaved in the fields; it would also remind her of the wrong she had suffered, of her own vow of vengeance yet to be fulfilled.

With a heavy heart Vanburg was making preparations for his journey to America. Silent, impassive, with the quiet, methodical thoroughness of one who has seen much travel, he attended personally to every detail. With the death of Bettina, hope, ambition, courage, had gone, and with stolid indifference he put all thought of the future from him. Life, shipwrecked at the outset, was a reality, and delays and inconveniences he met with cynical unconcern, his face expressionless, his mind in the past, his physical being responding to every demand made upon it. On his journey to Paris and London—he was to take a steamer at Liverpool—if there were other occupants in the railway carriage—apart from the knowledge that he was not alone, he was unconscious of their presence. Their voices were as meaningless sounds, and, sitting silent, impassive, he journeyed north.

Not until he was aboard the steamer did the nervous tension of the past week relax. Then the true measure of his loss, the hopelessness of his future swept over him,—but the turmoil was deep in his heart, in his soul, and no trace of suffering was noticeable. Appetite for food was gone, the power to woo sleep had left him, and pacing the deck through the long hours of the night brought little relief. Then he drank—he drank deeply, until his senses were benumbed, and sleep came.

TITO

The long days and the longer nights wore away, and the fever of hopeless unrest was ever with him; but the expression of his face remained the same, imperturbable. His step was firm, and his appearance that of the club man, the aristocrat. Years of athletic training, a physical and mental balance well nigh perfect were, as yet, responding to every demand.

Sitting apart, neither seeking nor encouraging intercourse with the other passengers, he had time to speculate of the future, to think of the home to which he was returning, of the father, haughty, unresponsive, whose expression of countenance would be an hourly reminder that his son must pay the penalty of his lowly marriage.

The journey's end reached, familiar sounds hummed about his ears, the rush of traffic roared a welcome, and, as it was early morning when he arrived, he was driven to his home—to meet his father before he departed for his downtown office.

It was not then nine o'clock, and when he entered the house, he was ushered into the dining room where his father was at breakfast. A formal greeting, an inquiry as to his health, and over their coffee they talked of matters connected with their European correspondents. By letter Vanburg had informed his father of Bettina's death, but no allusion was made to his marriage, no word of sympathy, of encouragement, of affection. The breakfast finished, with the remark that he was some minutes late, his father went out, and the younger Vanburg was alone.

TITO

"Just Heaven!" he exclaimed, "this sort of thing will drive me mad! I can't stand this unnatural existence—this atmosphere of reserve stifles me. Bettina, love, if you had only lived! You were the one tie that bound me to life—my one hope of the future. What is there left? If I had only been born a farmer's or a laborer's son, I might have something to live for, some great ambition might have been called into life—a determination to succeed. I might have had a father with a heart—now, nothing but this monstrous existence, this silent repression, unreal, inhuman. I have seen peasants on the continent eating black bread, and I have envied them, for they were human. They could smile, they could laugh, their eyes talked love, and their voices were natural. Wealth, education, social environments had not dwarfed their souls."

The day following his return to America he began his duties in his father's office. But work that once had fired his energy and ambition had become distasteful. What had formerly been a pleasure, he now looked upon as drudgery. But it was not alone his duties that preyed upon his mind, filling him with a growing discontent, it was the uncongenial home life, the formality, the studied politeness that maddened him, until, at the end of a day's work, he regarded the prospect of his return home with aversion. The seven o'clock dinner, prolonged, eaten in silence, save when interrupted by an exchange of courtesies that might pass between strangers, filled him with resentment,

TITO

and, after the first few months, he dined at his club, or at some fashionable café.

It was nearing the end of the first year since his return to America, and, though outwardly the relations between father and son were unchanged, both were conscious of a growing coldness. Nightly the younger Vanburg spent hours at his club; his associates marveling as they watched his headlong pace,—predicting an early collapse, speculating as to the length of time until he reached the stage that would be social suicide. His sorrow was yet keen; but his impassive, open expression of countenance changed only when a faint, engaging smile drew his friends still closer to him. He had the gift, rare as his open, manly nature, of making no enemies. In all the world only two hearts were turned against him. In far away Italy, where his love lay buried, two human beings mourned the loss that was his, but daily they raised their voices to record afresh their vow of vengeance.

CHAPTER V.

THE first year after his return had been to Vanburg a time of fitful unrest. His position in the banking office had long since become irksome; home life, and the daily meetings with his father over their prolonged, solitary dinner, usually eaten in silence, was repugnant to one of his genial nature, and his occasional dining at some fashionable restaurant became a fixed custom.

His father never referred to his marriage, but his attitude toward his son could not be misconstrued—it was one of silent, though unmistakable protest. If his son had ever enjoyed the confidence of his father it was now withdrawn, and each day, each hour of his life he was met with chilling, maddening reserve, as a reminder that his marriage was neither forgotten nor forgiven.

Rage filled the heart of the young man, for his love for Bettina was something sacred; his sorrow did not lessen with time, for memory, to a man of his nature, refuses to be stilled, or to grant the peace of mind that would come with forgetfulness.

He had been in the country with a college friend for a week's hunting, and on his return had dined at home. After smoking a cigar in his own apart-

TITO

ment, he was considering what he would do to pass the evening. He was in an unenviable frame of mind. His reception by his father, after his absence was, if possible, marked by an added reserve. With a cynical laugh he threw his partly smoked cigar into the open grate.

"Sweet life to lead!" he ejaculated. "I wonder what would happen if one were to really laugh in this house? I suppose the portraits of our patrician ancestors on the walls would reverse themselves without human aid,—or perhaps the ghosts of those who never married beneath them would stalk forth through the halls in mute protest of such ribald desecration. Heigh-ho! It's a weary world. Bettina, love, if all the virtues of all the Vanburgs of all time were concentrated in the humble descendant of the race, he would not be worthy of thee. What would my august father say to that? I believe I'll go to the club. There one can't think—which, at times, is a blessing. To-day is the twenty-seventh. I am an ingrate! I had forgotten the Hollander reception, and I promised Madge weeks ago I would be there. Madge,—she's a lovely girl, and as unworldly as a child; and Ned is one of the cleverest chaps that I know. Yet, I'd rather take a thrashing than meet the crush. The unreality of it all! I suppose I must dress. I'd as soon prepare for my own execution. That, at least, would have the virtue of genuineness. If one didn't know everyone else what a joy it would be. The worst that can be said of Woman is that she is a creature of frivolity and

TITO

—circumstances. Whatever vicious traits she may possess are born of vanity. Man *should* be honest. He has an opportunity to see, to learn, to know, to judge; yet I am certain to meet someone, whom I unfortunately know, wearing a society mask that he donned with evening dress, who, perhaps, cheats at cards. Oh, this world of sham, and deceit and—it is nearly ten o'clock!"

Half an hour later Vanburg was at the Hollander's.

"I say, Vannie," young Hollander was saying, "you look done up; been ill?"

"Ill!" Vanburg laughed. "Don't even know what a headache is like."

"I missed you for the past week. Been out of town?"

"Up the state with Worthington, hunting, near his country place. Fine time. Plenty of game, and a host who can tell what a good cigar is like."

"I envy you your vacation. Do you know, I don't fancy this sort of thing. It's Madge's and mother's affair. Have you seen Madge?"

"For only a moment. She is so occupied with her guests I felt guilty of trespass. Perhaps I can have a word with her later."

"Well, you needn't feel guilty—she's been asking for you. She has a wonderful new charity scheme. The East Side and all that. You know what young girls are! At some period of their innocent lives they believe themselves divinely commissioned to consecrate their spare funds, and ill-directed energies, to charity. For the past year

TITO

she has managed to wheedle the greater part of my salary from me. Why, she's as practical as the Governor!"

Vanburg smiled. He had more than a brother's appreciation for Madge.

"You may not believe me," resumed Hollander, noting Vanburg's smile, "but wait! She'll 'touch' you for your last quarter's salary."

They were not to remain long in doubt. Madge Hollander approached. She had not yet reached her twentieth birthday, but her carriage, and her perfect self-possession, was that of one who was many years older in the knowledge of the world and its ways. Her gown, severe in its simplicity, accentuated the lines of her perfect figure, but added nothing to her beauty. A frankness of expression, a piquant audacity, born of a pure mind and ignorance of fear, a smile that invited confidence, put you, meeting her for the first time, at ease. But in the gray eyes that looked squarely into yours, until it seemed as if they would unmask every indiscretion in your past life, there was an expression of authoritative reserve. Under the long black eyelashes you caught a glimpse of a woman, pure in thought, willing to believe that nothing but good exists, yet endowed with Man's knowledge of the world. What you saw was as a flashlight on the curtain of the soul. What lay beyond, you could not tell.

"Mr. Vanburg," she began.

"Mr. Vanburg," he repeated, mimicking her formal tone. "Since when have I become Mr.

TITO

Vanburg? Dear me! How deliciously formal young ladies become when society declares them old enough to discard short frocks."

"There, Horace, don't make fun! We aren't now playing tennis in the country."

"No," he laughed, "nor fishing at Willoughby Lake."

Madge flushed with pleasure, and her eyes danced at the remembrance.

"Those were the short frock days," she laughed.

"I wish they could have lasted always."

"What! and forego this?" His glance swept the crowded room with a significance she understood.

"It would not be a hardship," she rejoined.

"Our world is growing much like an over-cultivated orchid. It needs the freshness of the early summer morning to revive it. Its brilliancy deadens the senses, and we are becoming intellectually inert. We are in need of a moral tonic."

"Epigrammatic, metaphoric, moralistic! Quite! With what wisdom have your advanced years been blessed!"

"There, you won't be serious. Let us sit here. That's the new opera tenor who is singing. Do you care to hear him?"

"Not if you will consent to talk to me."

They sat on a divan at the far end of the room, apart from the crowd who were listening to the singing in the drawing room. Madge was eager to unfold her new charitable scheme, and her companion smiled at her youthful enthusiasm. Her

TITO

cheeks glowed, her eyes voicing the pleasure that was to accompany the unfolding of her wonderful project.

"Now," she began with an air of matronly seriousness, "I am going to tell you of our new—"

"Society with a long name," interrupted Vanburg, laughing. "It wouldn't do to have a short one. This society, if I have grasped the idea, is going to revolutionize the East Side. How much do I give?"

"Ned has been talking to you. That boy! All he cares for is golf and new plays! He can't take things seriously,"—then with a crestfallen air: "and I had anticipated the pleasure of telling you all about it."

"In that you shall not be disappointed," Vanburg replied. "I am here to listen. But first you may put my name down for whatever you wish."

"It is not alone your money we want—it's your co-operation."

"Well," he laughed, "you may put my name down on your list for that, too, and draw on me. I'll honor the draft on sight."

"But I must explain our project, perhaps you would not approve of it."

"You are concerned in it?"

"Yes, I'm the secretary." This with a proud uplifting of her shoulders.

"In that case," he rejoined, "you may double the original amount of my subscription. I have no way of knowing what you have mentally as-

TITO

sessed me, but it doesn't matter. Multiply it by two."

"You're the same Horace as when we danced together in the old days. Dear me! How aged we have grown. Now, you never dance." Then as if voicing a recurring thought, "Somehow, since your return from Europe you are not *quite* the same. At times I can read in your eyes the shadow of a story. You know if a man feels at all, he feels intensely, and he is very apt to betray his feelings. Men are more honest than women—also less artful. A man's face is a photographic gallery where hang his heart pictures. Before a woman allows sorrow or kindred emotions to reach her heart, she consults a mirror to arrange her expressions becomingly. Above all things that a woman dislikes, is to have the world believe she is unhappy."

Vanburg, interested and smiling, listened to the young girl. Was she the Madge he had known? No. The eyes that met his with daring candor were those of a woman of the world—one who had suddenly grown old in the knowledge of things that be.

"Why, Madge, who would ever have thought it! Now you are a sage. But let us return to the charity work. Tell me all about it."

Vanburg's light, bantering tone did not wholly deceive his listener. On his part, never before had he been tempted as then—to tell her the story of his love and his loss; for he trusted her as, perhaps,

TITO

he trusted no other human being. But the inclination was but momentary.

Madge outlined the work she was doing, work which, with the assistance of others, she hoped to accomplish.

"And," she was saying, as her brother approached, "this little one is under my personal supervision. Her name is Wilhelmina. Her father, John McGlennon, is, unfortunately, addicted to drink. Yet at some period of his life he must have been a gentleman. He is highly educated, but now works as a porter. The child is a lovable little creature. Willie, I call her; her father calls her 'Bill.' I don't fancy the diminutive, but then he is her father, and notwithstanding his habits, the child idolizes him."

"Now, Vannie, we know where our money goes. It's as easy as the rule of Three. From Madge to the child, then to the father, who once was a gentleman and now lifts boxes, then to—"

"There, Ned, that will do! You assume altogether too much." She flashed a reproving look at her brother. "The child's father would not accept a penny."

"Here, then," persisted Ned, "is something new in the history of the world's affairs—a father who drinks, and who will not take money, intended for his daughter, to pay for it. Madgie, you tax our credulity beyond—"

"Horace," said Madge, refusing to reply to her brother's remarks, "will you consent to go with us some day after office hours, to McGlennon's

TITO

home? I know you will feel more satisfied after the visit, and my protegee will be delighted."

"Any day you choose," said Vanburg, smiling.

"Then let it be to-morrow. You will call for us at papa's office?"

"Us?" queried Ned, excitedly. "Who might 'us' refer to?"

"You and me," quietly answered Madge. Then turning to Vanburg, "You will excuse me."

Vanburg rose, and Madge entered the drawing room. The glance of the two men followed her to the door. Her brother's one of conscious pride; in the eyes of Vanburg an expression approaching reverence.

"I say, Vannie," said his companion, turning to him with mock wrath, "you're a fine fellow! What kind of a mess have you got me into? The East Side, hard luck stories and all that!"

"Never mind, dear boy, Madge is worth the effort many times over. Besides, it will do us good. We know altogether too much of our own world and too little of the other. You will come round to the club?"

"Yes, if it's not too late."

After taking leave of his hostess Vanburg walked slowly down the avenue.

When he entered the club room he was met by a volley of vociferous greetings from a party of young men sitting about a card table, and he listened with feelings akin to pleasure. They were a manly set,—full chested and broad shouldered; and though they had drunk freely, their eyes were

TITO

clear, for they were in a physical condition due to constant athletic training.

"Davis," said Harriman, "you must write an ode to the return of the prodigal; meanwhile, we'll drink."

"And eat," said Davis, "the Muse works better on blue points and Mumms."

"Insatiable Muse! Ned Hollander, you're just in time, old man. Wine or beer?"

"Sherry," answered Hollander. "Clean done up. Social duties, you know."

"I say, we've been trying to wring from Van where he's been for a week past. He's as mum as one of the oysters that Davis is feeding to the Muse. When it comes to divulging things, Vannie is as close as a precinct captain. Come, Davis, is the Muse ready? Give us something on the tender passion. Our friend Van has been rusticating in the country. Now some fair dairy-maid's heart is like the pitcher at the well—broken."

Davis chanted sotto voce:

"Oh, love is like a bird in flight,
That's ever on the wing, Tra-la;
Forever trying to alight,
The simple, foolish thing, Tra-la.

Oh, little bird be wary thou,
For danger lies in wait for thee;
You listen! Can't you hear it now?
'Tis calling! 'Tis a mate for thee.

TITO

Take care, oh little bird, take care,
The tale of love is new to thee:
A lover's words are always fair;
While wooing, he is true to thee."

"That's fairly good, Davis; continue feeding the Muse and rhyme some more. Suppose you fellows heard that Lawrence son made \$50,000 or more floating the New Consolidated."

"Did he? Lucky dog! Somehow everything he touches turns to money. Van, are you in the market?"

"Not to any dangerous extent," he laughed. "Governor won't allow it. I'm on the same footing with the other clerks. 'Gainst the rules, you know."

"I'd like to see the rules made that you'd follow. The old gent's the only living being who can keep you in trim."

"Good old chap, the governor," replied Vanburg.

"You're easily satisfied, Vannie. If my governor was the head of one of the largest banking houses in the city, I'd see myself doing the grind you follow. Guess not! During the summer, I'd condescendingly allow the light of my countenance to cast its refulgent rays on Newport. Cairo would be good enough in winter."

"I rather think the governor knows what is best for me. I have more faith in him than he has in me. Besides, you forget that I'm quite content."

TITO

"Some people are easily satisfied,—I've noticed that."

In the rear of the room two elderly gentlemen were smoking, exchanging confidences and the gossip of the street. The elder of the two was saying:

"Young Vanburg is going the pace. Wonder his father doesn't curb him."

"Let him alone. We were young once; and he'll tone down. They tell me his father bears harder on him than on any clerk in his employ. If he were my boy, I would be proud to take him into the firm. What can be gained by these radical measures? It's a wonder the young man doesn't bolt. He is a fine, fearless fellow; yet there's something about him that I can't fathom—his very frankness baffles me. I like the boy; though I'm free to admit I don't understand him."

"He comes by it naturally," remarked the other. "If his father is not what might be termed unfathomable, then the hieroglyphics on the Egyptian Sphinx are as A, B, C. His nature seems completely soured."

"Some trouble, wasn't it? Divorced from the wife, who died shortly after? I have forgotten the story."

"That's why he is so severe on the boy. You can't make blood out of water, neither can you make water out of blood. The young fellow is full of life; but I'm afraid he's living a bit high. His father must know it?"

"How can he help it,—the boy lives at home?"

TITO

He ought to behave. He has a fine prospect ahead of him. Edwin Vanburg must be worth from three to five millions—surely that. He'll never marry again."

"There was some talk of the boy being engaged to young Hollander's sister."

"So I believe. Never gave much credence to the report. She's a beautiful girl, and he couldn't do better. I hardly think, though, he's of the marrying kind."

The laughter of the young men interrupted.

"You're not going now?" Harriman's voice was entreating. "It's early. Gad, you must have a rendezvous. It's only twelve o'clock."

"Must be getting home," Vanburg replied.

A chorus of good natured raillery followed him to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

IT is not good to look into the faces of human beings that have lost every vestige of the intellectual, faces upon which crime and viciousness have left their stamp. It is not pleasant to meet eyes and read their story of guilt, of sorrow, of dishonor; to look at cheeks, to which shame can lend no color, cheeks that had, at some time, been touched by a mother's embrace; to hear voices hard, metallic, rasping, breathing oaths that should have scorched the lips of the abandoned speakers. All this is debasing and soul-harrowing, yet it is pathetic beyond human power to describe, and it was this that met the eyes and the ears of Madge and her companions in the late afternoon as they crossed the Bowery on their way to McGlennon's. Madge had insisted on walking, preferring that her visit should be made in an unostentatious manner; but the sight of the human wrecks, and what she was forced to hear, gave her a feeling of heart-sickness. Her brother's scolding, for coming into the locality, she listened to without protest—her only answer a smile of affection.

Fifteen minutes' walk and they were before the home of the McGlennon's. The entrance from the street was through an alleyway leading to a court. Here a new world seemed to confront them. On

TITO

four sides rose dilapidated frame buildings, their rickety walls scarcely able to support the crumbling eaves, whose zigzag course cut fantastic figures against the blue of the sky above—the walls seeming on the point of tumbling into the narrow court. It was as though the buildings had been caught in an avalanche of the moving world, which threatened to terminate their existence in its grinding embrace. For only one hour of the twenty-four did the sun's rays touch the brick pavement of the dismal court; for the remainder of the day and the night, gloom, like a blanket of sorrow, fell upon its desolate confines. This was Shadow Alley, and those so unfortunate as to call the place home, prayed with lusty zeal when their hearts turned to Heaven, fought in drunken frenzy when occasion demanded, or cursed the fates that had frowned upon their illspent lives.

Madge and her companions mounted the rickety stairs to the second floor, where they were met by McGlennon's daughter, who had seen them enter the court. Madge greeted the child affectionately. Bill held out her hand to the two men with engaging frankness.

"I am so glad you came," she said.

Madge and the child talked together in low tones, which gave the two men opportunity to observe and ponder. This was a phase of life they had never before encountered:—the cheerless room, the pine table, the few wooden chairs, the mournful, lamenting tick-tack of the clock on the mantel, in harmony with the heart-depressing bar-

TITO

renness of its surroundings. But the floor had been scrubbed clean until the worn boards seemed to protest as they lay in little ridges and gullies, and, like an old garment, its patches and scars told its own story of age and of wear.

Bill, in dress and general appearance, was in keeping with the room, in fact, she seemed a part of it. She was as clean as was the floor, as precise and as methodical as was the clock, and quite as old fashioned. Her boots shone like the little iron cook stove in the corner, and, like the stove, they had as many rents and scars and patches hidden under a shiny coat of polish. The color of the print dress she wore was what might be chosen by such an old fashioned little woman, and matched the paintless table and chairs to a nicety and—here was the saddest point of resemblance—her face was the color of the whitewashed ceiling, her extreme pallor, and high forehead, making her appear years older than she was. Care, worry, and the lack of good nourishment had retarded the growth of her body, but her mind, under the pressure of responsibility, had raced ahead into the domain of womanhood.

"He will be here soon," she was saying to Madge. "They discharged him this morning because he was late. I feel so sorry! and you don't know how good he is!"

Her look of displeasure was a protest against an unthinking world, that could discriminate against her father's habitual condition.

TITO

Madge smoothed her hair gently. "Never mind," she said, "we must get him another place."

A heavy step on the stairs announced McGlen-non's return. The door opened and he paused on the threshold, looking at one and then another of the occupants of the room. He reeled where he stood, but recognizing Madge, removed his cap, and bowed to her with easy grace, a courtesy which included her companions.

Even in his workman's garb he was a remarkable looking man, his herculean chest and shoulders, owing to his extreme height, which was over six feet, being in perfect proportion. Though under the influence of drink he stood erect, his finely formed head thrown back, his unconscious attitude one of equality. At some time in the past he had been a gentleman of refinement, of education, and time and dissipation had, as yet, failed to wholly efface the stamp of respectability.

"Bill," he said apologetically, "I didn't know that you had visitors. Pardon me," he said, thickly, "I believed my daughter to be alone. Don't let me disturb you. You see," he continued, "Bill doesn't mind when I am—well, under the influence of drink; and, ordinarily, there's no one else to consider. Had I known, Miss," he addressed Madge, "that you were here, though the knowledge would have made no difference in my condition, it would have led me elsewhere. Bill," he said, laying his hand on the child's head, "I'm sorry, I'm very sorry I came home; I'll go out

TITO

again. You may then apologize for your father. It's not nice, child, but it's necessary."

His daughter held his hand closer. The young men exchanged glances. Who was this man whose manner indicated education and good breeding? He spoke with a slight Scotch accent, but the tone of his voice was that of a scholar and a gentleman.

"You are surprised," he said, addressing Vanburg, "so am I, and yet,—no! it's of my own choosing. Once I was not a porter. My profession now is to lift boxes. Eh, gad! that's something of an art to do well. Bill, dear, if you wish to talk to the lady, invite her into the other room. You see," he continued jocularly with a wave of his hand, "we have a suite. Yon is Bill's room."

Madge and Bill went into the adjoining room, her father's eyes following them to the door.

"Young man," said McGlennon in a steadier voice, "I, too, once bore the stamp of respectability; but that is so long ago! I wouldn't remember the time if I could. There are two classes of persons that remember,—those whom memory benefits and fools. So I have forgotten all but—Bill. When my memory becomes obtrusive, I get drunk. It needs no logic to convince you that drunkards can't remember, hence I won't attempt it."

"It's plain to be seen," said Vanburg, "that you were not always in such circumstances as, unfortunately, we now find you."

"No," he answered in a firmer tone, "but that

TITO

was at a time I would forget. Memory is the least merciful of our faculties—it is domineering, relentless. Drink is its only master—hence I am drunk most of the time. When I am not, it is because of lack of funds. That,” he laughingly continued, “is a logical excuse, if not a moral one.”

Vanburg and his companion listened in wonder; yet they readily divined that some mystery in the life of this man had turned the current of his existence.

They were about to go and, as Madge and Bill descended the stairs, Ned caught Vanburg’s eye. Understanding the look, young Hollander followed his sister and left him alone with McGlennon.

Vanburg took a bank bill from his pocket and was about to place it on the mantel, when McGlennon, anticipating the action, raised his hand in protest. In an instant he seemed perfectly sobered. His form straightened and he shook his head.

“As a loan,” Vanburg said.

“No, I appreciate your motive, but I can get on without the money; besides it would go where all my earnings have found their way—to the saloon. Thank you, but I will not accept it. It is not for love of liquor that I drink—it helps me to forget.”

“Sir,” replied Vanburg, “I realize what you have gone through. We are, in a sense, comrades in misfortune.” He held out his hand. McGlen-

TITO

non grasped it eagerly and, standing proudly erect, looked squarely at his companion.

"Good bye," he said. "We shall, I trust, see each other again."

Vanburg rapidly descended the stairs and together the three turned homeward.

After leaving Madge and her brother, he entered an uptown café, and seated himself at a table.

It was nearing his dinner hour, but he had no intention of going home. Only on rare occasions did he dine with his father, for he was conscious that their relations were strained, and he usually sought restaurants or hotels where he would be least likely to meet acquaintances.

"What has crossed McGlennon's life?" he mused. "I can picture him when he was my age, and what a specimen of manhood he must have been. And now, he is fast becoming a wreck, a physical derelict,—all but his mind, which refuses the peace he craves, and tortures him. That is, also, very much alive. What a hell his life must be! Regrets and remorse. If it weren't for the child, he would kill himself with drink. Unless my judgment has already begun to feel the effect of this red devil here—" he held the whiskey in his hand—"McGlennon is a University man. And now he lifts boxes. Merciful Heaven! The effect is apparent. I wonder if drink was the effect or the cause? Anyway, he is living in hell. Shall I reach such a stage? Do not all reach it? And the torment will be kept alive because the mind refuses to crumble with the decaying body.

TITO

And there will be days and nights, and nights and days; and then, Heaven willing, madness comes. Am I starting on the road that leads to—will it end in drink and forgetfulness or—I shudder at the other—the years of damnable torture—a memory that will not die! I am throwing down the gauntlet to fate, playing with dice that are loaded; and yet, what is there left for me? My sun has reached the meridian and is slowly sinking. Eh, faith! I'll send it down in a blaze of glory."

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER dining at an uptown hotel, Vanburg went to the club. The rooms were nearly deserted, a few of the older members lounging in comfortable easy chairs, exchanging notes of the business world, or enjoying their after dinner cigar, and it was with a feeling of relief that he noted the absence of the younger set—those who were his particular friends. His entrance was unnoticed and, taking a magazine from the table, he sank into an armchair which faced the door, and began lazily turning the leaves. But he was in no humor to read, and, glancing at the engravings, laid the book on the table beside him.

"I wonder," he mused, "if the articles in that magazine inspired such outrageously bad art."

Settling himself comfortably, he puffed rings of smoke into the air, quite unconscious of the sound of voices behind him. But as though his ear was tuned to the name, he heard his own mentioned. The speaker had raised his voice in indignant protest.

"The whole proceeding is a—outrage. While the young man was absent, his father employed an expert to go over his books. No attempt at secrecy was made—every clerk in the office knows it."

TITO

"Davis says his father cabled to Europe to look into his transactions abroad."

"Davis is a cad. He talks too much; yet it's quite true."

"Horace can't know of it; he's not one of the kind to stand such treatment—even from his father."

"All rot—sheer rot! They found errors, evidence of carelessness, that's all."

"His father believed him to be speculating heavily. Mark me! When the young fellow learns the truth, which he must, there'll be the devil to pay! I have known him since boyhood, and will bank my life on his honor and his honesty."

Vanburg, his elbow resting on the cushioned side of the chair, his forearm upright, between his fingers a partly smoked cigar burning feebly, listened: on his face the same expression as when Mother Malenotti had told him that Bettina would die. Placing the cigar between his lips, his arms resting on the sides of the capacious chair, he resumed smoking. But a faint, cynical smile played about the corners of his mouth,—a smile that those who knew him well would have recognized as a danger signal. It was with such a smile he had faced his opponents on the football field in some of the hardest fought games during his college career. It was with the same look of smiling unconcern that, in southern Italy, he had stood before an enraged Italian who, with uplifted knife, had rushed at him, and, after breaking the

TITO

fellow's arm with a blow, had lifted him bodily into the air and dashed him to the ground.

Rising hastily he strode toward the men who had been discussing the affairs of the bank. They were old friends whom he had known for many years.

"Thank you for your confidence in me," he said in a calm tone, holding out his hand. "I was sitting near and could not help overhearing."

They shook his hand warmly and, without another word, he went out.

He did not follow his first impulse and go home to demand of his father why he had put this disgrace upon him. Turning up the avenue he entered the Park. Heedless of direction, at times going in a circle, he walked on and on, finding himself first on the east side, then on the west side of the Park, only to retrace his steps and plunge into the darkest recesses.

But the hours of walking had accomplished his purpose, and when he returned home he was outwardly calm. No human being could do more than conjecture what were his feelings. The same inscrutable look, the same shadow of a smile, and a manner that betrayed neither anger nor resentment.

Father and son possessed many characteristics in common, but in many ways they were as unlike as it is possible for those of the same blood to be. The father's pride, verging on haughty arrogance, blinded his sense of justice. The son was imbued with a spirit of fairness, a superior intellect, and a

TITO

calmness of judgment and manner that might be mistaken for indifference.

As they stood facing each other, the advantage was entirely with the younger man. Their eyes met, but if either were laboring under excitement or apprehension, he did not betray it.

"Well?" It was the elder Vanburg who first spoke.

"Is it true, sir, as I have been informed, that during my absence my accounts have been examined by an expert?"

For an instant a faint color mounted to the old man's cheeks, but died as quickly.

"Yes," he replied, without removing his glance from the face of his son.

"Why?"

"I had reason to believe, or to expect, that your accounts were incorrect."

"And you took this means of ascertaining the truth, and of publicly branding me with dishonor?"

Again the faint smile hovered about the corners of the speaker's mouth. His tone was one of calm courtesy, his eyes leveled at the face before him.

"There was no further publicity than was necessary. I desired to learn the exact condition of your books."

"And you did learn?"

"Not to my entire satisfaction."

The blood rushed to the young man's cheeks, followed by an ashen pallor. His voice was unnaturally low as he answered, his words measured.

TITO

"And you still believe me to be a defaulter?"

At the word "defaulter" a quiver swept the old man's frame, but his voice was pitched in the same monotone.

"What had I a right to expect? A son of mine who would marry a low, Italian peasant—"

"Stop! you have dishonored me in the eyes of the world. You must rest satisfied with that. The memory of her of whom you speak is sacred to me—more sacred than the name of Vanburg. I was never worthy of her, I could never hope to be."

His tone and manner in speaking of the wrong that had been done him were those of sorrowful reproach; but at the reference to Bettina, his self-control vanished, and his voice, trembling with passion, rang through the room. His father looked at the flushed face and, for an instant, emotions akin to pride and love moved him; but he also recognized in the flashing eyes, the compressed lips, the spirit of the mother whose name he had never mentioned in the presence of his son. In his voice, as he replied, there was an added sting.

"You are my son, yes, but you have your mother's blood."

"For that," came the reply with slow distinctness, "I thank God. To-night my services with the bank terminate. To-night I leave this house. I have one request to make:—when you discover your error, I ask you to make it as public as is now my disgrace."

TITO

For an instant terror filled the eyes that followed young Vanburg until the door closed behind him. When he was alone the father sank into his seat, his face ashen gray, his eyes still fixed on the door through which his son had passed. He sat motionless until he heard him descend the stone steps to the street.

A time had come when he must call upon his pride, his arrogance, to sustain him. With what results? Lips that quivered, eyes into which the tears would come, hands that trembled as if with palsy, and more than all the conscious, overwhelming, sickening truth, that mocked him, taunted him,—that he had wronged his son. He felt it, he knew it, he had read it in his son's eyes—the son whom he had never known, the son whom he had refused to know, to love. His pride! Was that not left to him? But to what use, to what purpose? Had he not called upon it to rally to his aid? and he had found it—what? Something that limped on crutches of rotten clay that crumbled and lay at his feet—dead ashes. Would his son return? No. So far he knew him. What was left to him? Nothing but the remnants of the pride that for a lifetime he had fostered and petted and pampered. Yes, he would gather from the wreck whatever was left, and it would again take on the semblance of life; but it would be a misshapen thing, feeble and faltering and, like a treacherous friend, desert him should it hear his call for aid.

TITO

Slowly the hours dragged on, and the gray light of dawn was a reminder that he had not slept.

After leaving his home, Vanburg went at once to a hotel on Fifth Avenue. Writing out his resignation to his club, he dropped it into a letter box. From that moment his world, for him, had ceased to exist.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOTHER MALENOTTI sat knitting in the living room of her home, situated a few miles south of Florence in the valley of the Arno.

Through the open door, the brilliancy of an Italian sunset accentuated the emptiness of the humble abode with distressing clearness. The house bore the stamp of the peasant's home, cheerless and uninviting, and no touch of comfort pervaded the scantily furnished room where she was at work. Though the house was gloomy within, a glance over the sweep of country from the threshold of the door was like a glimpse of Heaven from the confines of Purgatory. On no canvas was ever depicted the beauty that there unrolled before the eye. Gradually descending, the land sloped in a succession of varied tints of green, until it terminated at the banks of the river Arno,—a seam of silver, dividing the rolling plain. Beyond, the fields stretched in undulating waves of color, lost in the hazy clouds enveloping the distant Apennines. The house, itself, stood some feet from the roadway, raising its brick roof in the centre of the garden; but the ugliness of its four walls had not the power to mar the beauty of the surrounding country. To the eye, everything was

TITO

Italian—the blue of the sky, the green of the foliage, the flowers, the fragrance of the soft breeze, and that inimitable atmosphere that can be found only in the land of sculptors, of painters, of a people in whom artistic instincts are developed as in no other land, under no other sky—Italy.

Turning from the threshold and the glory of the wondrous sunset, the eye, with an effort, became accustomed to the gloom within the house. As the light, through the open door, fell upon the bent figure of Mother Malenotti, even its mellow glow could not soften the lines of her hardened features. Deeper and more forbidding than when we last saw her was the expression on her wrinkled features. Kindliness or sentiment never disturbed the fixed expression of savage resentment that flashed from her eyes; a smile seldom softened the tense, drawn lines about her mouth, for time had dealt unkindly with her. Her back was bent by the accumulation of years and the weight of labor; her hair was snow white; and the climate of America had planted in her system the seed of rheumatic ills which made her life a torment, imparting to her temper a crustiness that banished the few friends she had once claimed. One by one they had slipped out of her life, until she was left alone with young Tito and the memory of her Bettina. The years had not lessened her sorrow nor quenched the fire of her hate. Indeed, passing time, and increasing ills, only tended to fan the flame, and from brooding upon her loss had come a belief—fixed, sincere, fostered by her

TITO

mental and physical suffering, that Vanburg had been the cause of all her misfortune.

During the month following the death of her niece, Mother Malenotti had left Florence, not, however, to return to her own home. Her relatives and friends she had shunned, and, with the money realized from the sale of the furnishings of their home in Florence, she had purchased the house and bit of land where we now find her. Here, with the child, Tito, she lived a life of seclusion—making no acquaintances and repulsing all advances. With a flash in her eyes, a look, and an unspoken curse on her lips she answered those in whom the child awakened curiosity. His name was Tito—just Tito. To those unwise enough to ask for further information, a forbidding silence on her part was the only response. She was known by the name of Madame Rossi; the child? *Madonna!* the child is the son of one who is dead; and now I must slave for him that he may live.

Of Pietro they saw but little. Three or four times yearly, on a holiday, he came to the cottage and remained a day or two, leaving them as he had come, sullen and silent. At first he regarded the boy with an indifference amounting to dislike, for, though he was Bettina's child, his hate for the father was keenly alive. But as Tito grew, and the years added to his beauty, he would hold the boy before him at arm's length, and, in the startled eyes, fair features, and quivering lips—for Tito feared him,—he could see the face of the dead Bettina. Then, for hours, he would watch the

TITO

boy, and a savage love took possession of him,—a love that, as time passed, amounted to idolatry. But no responsive chord was touched in the child's heart, for his instinct rebelled, and he received the presents with which Pietro sought to win his favor with suspicion, mingled with disdain, and when the old man had departed he would throw them from him.

Pietro listened to the old woman with demoniac glee while she related to him the child's vows of vengeance, and the hate for his father which she had instilled into the boy's heart.

"Ah, but I may trust thee," was Pietro's reply, "thou couldst outwit the devil. But should the boy fail—"

"He will not," was her reply.

"But should he—"

Their eyes met. The old man's head shook as if with ague. They said nothing further, but they understood.

The boy grew and beauty set upon him as by right. He gave promise of marvelous things, for, though his mind was steeped with the venom of the old woman's hate, his body was well nourished with the best of peasant fare, and even luxuries that his foster-mother scorned. When his baby prattle became intelligible, and he could lisp the first few words, a fierce joy shone in the old woman's face, but her laugh chilled the blood. Even the child looked with fearful, wondering eyes at the features distorted by ghoulish mirth—features that betrayed no other human emotion

TITO

than the hate that grew with her increasing years.

She could see in the boy's eyes the dreaminess, the exquisite gentleness of the child Bettina; but she cursed the fair skin and the sturdy robustness that spoke of other than Italian blood. Tito seemed to absorb from her the fierce vindictiveness that dominated her being, and he often yielded to uncontrollable bursts of passion. He would lisp curses with the soft Italian inflection, in a tone that, in a child, is nearest to spoken music. For an evening prayer, he would follow the old woman, word for word, as she breathed into his ears oaths and imprecations upon his father,—he who had been ashamed to acknowledge the wife that had borne him a child. The wondering eyes of the boy sought those that shot gleams of hate, as, in his childish treble, he called upon the saints to preserve him until, with his own hand, he could avenge his wrong.

"Say it again, my Tito, say it again!" she would shriek, and the child would again lisp the curses that at first fell from his lips in unmeaning, childish monotones, but that grew with his understanding, fierce and passionate.

She carefully hid from him all knowledge of the world. He was forbidden books, for she looked upon schools as the breeding places of discontent.

"He shall become a true son of Italy," the old woman declared. "He shall be a son of the soil—a true peasant. He will then feel the blood in his veins, and some day he will awake to the power

TITO

within him. His mind? bah! that is for me! he shall think as I think; he shall feel what I feel—the hate, and the joy of knowing that he can avenge himself—and me.”

When Tito was eight years old the *parroco* of the village came with offers of good advice. Mother Malenotti met him with eyes that flashed a warning. “It is time,” the good man said, “that young Tito prepared for his first communion. Must not the soul be nourished as well as the body? He must learn the story of the *Cristo*. Madame Rossi, you do not come to mass. What think you of your example for the boy?”

The good man’s show of solicitude was cut short by a flood of abuse that sent him shuddering from the house. The child laughed and clapped his hands with delight.

But the beauty of nature was at work upon his susceptible mind, and the fields and the flowers spoke a language that appealed to the finer instincts within him. He was much alone, wandering through the fields and the woods. He appreciated nature’s picture of the beautiful. The birds spoke to him words which he understood, which aroused emotions that thrilled him. The patter of the raindrops seemed voices of another world; and the brooks and the streams, as they joined the Arno on its way to the sea, bore his childish confidences. He could not understand the feelings that moved him when alone, and he confided in but one, his only companion and play-fellow, little Maria; for boys of his age shunned him.

TITO

She, a child of Tito's age, would have been homeless but for the charity of relatives. She had been his one companion since he could remember. They had shared their sorrows, and whatever joys they had ever known; and it was Maria, who, against all the world, had championed the cause of her boy lover. But her trust in Tito brought upon her the enmity of every child in the country round, even the wrath of those who daily reminded her that she was a charge upon their bounty, for the boy was regarded with disfavor; but threats were of no avail, and her voice was always raised in his defence.

They roamed through the woods, the fields, leaping over wall and hedge, wading through the brooks, tearing through underbrush, like two wild fawns, appearing suddenly to the peasants in the fields—untamed children of nature.

But as Tito grew and his plan for seeking his father took definite form, Maria, with startled eyes, the color coming and going under the light, hazel nutbrown of her velvety cheeks, listened with bated breath and trembling fear to her companion's vow of vengeance. Tearfully she pleaded with him, for the horror of his vow terrified her; but the boy put her gently aside, telling her, tenderly, that she could not understand. Noting her distress, realizing that she could not enter into his purpose—a purpose that, to him, was but the pursuit of justice,—he ceased to discuss with her what caused her evident pain, and, when together, they surrendered themselves to the joy of living, happy

TITO

with the birds and the flowers, and the love promises which they daily made.

Music became a passion with him, and at times he would—unconsciously—lift his voice in songs he learned from the peasants at work in the fields. His voice, strong and unerringly true, rose in a high treble that rang on the stillness with pathetic tenderness and beauty; but it served to bring upon him the wrath of Mother Malenotti. It reminded her of another voice that she had loved and, in breathless wonder, young Tito listened to the storm of passion which his simple song aroused. He did not sympathize with the old woman in her desire for revenge. Gazing fixedly at her, his questioning eyes told that the good within him rebelled. But her irascibility left its imprint upon his sensitive nature and, as his passion was allowed free rein, the intensity of her fierce vindictiveness sank into his soul.

As Tito grew his fair beauty brought upon him the envy and the wrath of those of his age. They heaped upon him insults that stung him into a rage. Taunting him with a stain upon his birth, they called him "Little Bastard," to see the fire in his eyes, and to hear him give way to a whirlwind of invectives. Tingling with shame and humiliation, he would demand of the old woman if it were true that he was fatherless, nameless. For answer, she would shriek with delight: "Beat them, my Tito, beat them! Art thou not strong? Do I not feed thee with the best? Listen!" And she would relate tales of her countrymen, tales of hate, of

TITO

revenge, of conquest, until the child's eyes would dilate with excitement, his cheeks flush at the thought of the shame he must avenge.

Fierce and prompt was the punishment of his defamers. Bloody was the outcome of his encounters and, as he presented himself to the old woman with blood-stained face and hands, he tingled with the joy that conquerors feel. His reward was the old woman's cry of joy, *soldi* to squander as he would, and the assurance that when he had avenged his mother's wrong, wealth, untold wealth, awaited them.

"But my father?" young Tito demanded, "you have not told me of my father."

Clutching the boy by the arm till he writhed with pain, she gave way to shrill, terrible laughter.

"Thou shalt know him, aye, thou shalt know him—when the time comes. When thou art strong, my Tito, and can strike, even to his heart—then shalt thou know his name. He is great—do you hear? and rich! But he hated me! and I hated him—and it has grown and grown and grown!"

It was the twenty-fourth day of June, the feast of St. John the Baptist. Tito was then nine years of age, strong, well developed, with the form, the features and the carriage of a young god. He had thrashed those of his age, and those who were years older, into a state of subjection that breeds respect. He walked proudly erect, and was allowed the freedom of action and of speech that a strong arm and unquestioned courage commands. He knew nothing of God, he feared not man, and

TITO

he calmly viewed the procession of children as they marched through the village to the church,—the only feeling awakened within him being a large contempt. After mass the *parroco* accosted him before the church door.

"Well, little heretic, hast thou yet learned to fear God?"

"No," came the prompt reply, "nor thee."

"*Demonietto!* is it this that thou hast been taught?"

He shook the cane that he carried in his hand at Tito, who unflinchingly stood his ground.

"If thou strikest me," said the child calmly, though his eyes blazed, "when I am older I will beat thee."

"*Via!*" cried the enraged priest, "thou art a child of the devil!"

"If I am a child of the devil, thou art a swine," answered the intrepid Tito. "Thou art fat and greasy, aye, and lazy—even like a pig. I am not afraid of thy stick."

The good man went his way with a muttered malediction upon the unheeding Tito, who smiled sweetly, conscious that he had routed the enemy; and, with head high, he strode through the village in proud disdain born of his late conquest. But here more of the enemy were in waiting.

"Well, *Piccolo d'Ignoti*, with thy English blood and angel face, thou dost not come to the church! neither dost thou know thy own father. Thou art of the dirty *Americani*. Go to America, thou lit-

TITO

tle whelp, with thy girl face. Thou art not of *Italia*."

This was not to go unchallenged, and when his strength was exhausted,—for the odds were three to one against him—young Tito, with blood disfigured face, appeared before Mother Malenotti.

"Tell me," he said, "am I an *Americano*? Who is this father that I have never seen? Tell me of him, for I will know. Nay," he cried between his sobs, as the old woman endeavored to turn him away unsatisfied, "I will know! If thou dost not tell me I will run away. Dost thou hear? I will go to the sea, and I shall go in a ship," and he called to his aid such a stream of oaths, that the old woman shrieked with delight.

"Ah! my Tito, thou art now my son, my own Tito. Yes, I will tell thee, truly I will tell thee. And thou shalt go to America, my own Tito, when thou art older and stronger. Then shalt thou know thy father—the father that deserted thee, the father that ruined my life and stole my beloved Be—"

She stopped suddenly, overcome by her wrath, checked by her desire to guard the secret of his parentage. Her eyes glowed with tigerish longing for revenge, and she beat her hands upon the table as she leaned towards the boy.

"Thou shalt know, my Tito," she continued, "but not now, not now. It is not yet time. And thou wilt keep thy vow?"

The eyes of the child flashed. "Have I not to-day for the hundredth time been told I have no



"I SWEAR NOT BY THAT!"
(Page 65.)

TITO

father? I know only shame! See!" he cried, wiping off the blood that still disfigured his face, "is he not the cause of this?"

"Aye!" hissed the old woman. "It flows from thy face. That will heal. Mine is the heart's blood that has flowed these years, these years."

Snatching a crucifix from the mantel, she held it before him.

"Swear," she cried, holding it out to him, "swear that thou wilt never receive the sacrament until thou hast avenged thy mother, till, with thy father's life thou hast wiped out thy disgrace. Swear it, my Tito!"

"I swear," cried the child, "but—" grasping the crucifix and dashing it against the brick wall of the fireplace,—“I swear not by that! What has it done for me? Has it given me a father? No! Who am I? What am I? *Angioletto! Piccolo d'Ignoti*. Do I go through the village, what do I hear? Why do they call me these names? Thou dost not tell me who I am,—who my father is. Thou tellest me wait, and wait, always wait, and that is all. I am tired of waiting—and of fighting; but I must fight when they say these things to me. I shall go and seek this father, dost thou hear, old woman? I shall go! And I shall ask him if he has a better name to give me than *Angioletto! d'Ignoti*. And if he be dull, even old, I will prick him with the point of my knife—to enliven his wits. And I shall see if his blood is redder than mine and if it can flow as freely. And I shall hear him cry out

TITO

—for he is a coward! Dost thou understand me, old woman? A coward, a coward, a coward!”

What young Tito had failed to learn from books he seemed to have acquired intuitively. Without being aware of how the knowledge had come to him he could, in a laborious manner, read and write; but Mother Malenotti frowned upon his efforts. Absorbing knowledge of good or evil without apparent effort, his young mind sought the food that it craved, and an opportunity for good being denied, he grasped that which was within reach. But the bent of his intellect found nothing to satisfy its cravings. It was balked, starved, and unconsciously fretted under enforced restraint. He despised the feelings of hate and of revenge with which his nature became imbued, but a living example was ever before him, and he came to believe that revenge was the one ambition that should be satisfied. Love within him, except his love of nature, and his boyish passion for Maria, was still unborn. He had never sufficiently considered the old woman to analyze his feelings toward her; yet he disliked her—she filled him with a feeling of savage resentment. Since he could remember, never had an affectionate word passed between them; no gentle touch had soothed his childish passions and troubles, though in her own way she was kind to him; but her kindness took the form of well prepared food that would nourish the body. She would have him strong, vigorous, and she fed him as they feed cattle that are being fattened for the market.

TITO

With a child's quick perception he divined the old woman's intentions, and he regarded her with shuddering distrust and awe. But he had outgrown his fear, and now as she looked at him, her eyes gloating with joy, she roused him to a frenzy. He saw the gleam of the eyes, cold, calculating, her bent and decrepit figure in the uncertain light of early evening. He rushed from the house, followed by the old woman's inhuman laughter.

She picked up the broken crucifix and, kissing the cross, laid it on the mantel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE years went by, bringing to Mother Malenotti increasing ills and aches. Her mind was failing, and she talked incoherently of her life in America. She guarded her secret with the cunning of the weak-minded, and though the boy listened, hoping to learn from her the story of his birth, he was forced to be content with disjointed sentences, and vague allusions to her former home. But what he did hear whetted his curiosity, and he listened patiently to her child-like babble. Young as he was, he understood that her mental condition foreshadowed the end. Her step was feeble and her voice weak, but her failing health seemed, if possible, to enliven her desire for revenge, and her hate grew in proportion as her strength failed. Fixing her eyes on the boy she would gaze at him with a gleam of longing tenderness. "Yes," she would mutter, "he has her eyes, her voice, but, *Diavolo!*" she would shriek, "Little Devil, go away, go away, you have your father's fair skin, yes, and his head! And like thine, his eyes, when it pleased him to look at me, cut like a knife. But he seldom took the trouble to see me. Dost thou hear? To him, I was a thing—a creature!"

Pausing, she would look long and fixedly at the

TITO

boy. "Turn thy head to one side, Tito, so,—*Madre de Dio!* It is his face. Yes, yes, the same proud, insolent curve of the head. Go away!" she would cry; then relapse into her customary drone and, rocking to and fro, bewail her ill-luck and her declining strength.

All one early Spring day Tito listened to the old woman's lamentations. At times she seemed to be in full possession of her faculties; her mind was clear, and she talked understandingly. But she was alert, on her guard, and refused to discuss what was uppermost in the child's thoughts. Unconscious of her physical and mental decline, she postponed the day when she would enlighten the boy as to his birth—his father. No threats, no entreaties on his part, had power to move her—he should know when the time came. Then, only then.

They were sitting before the door of the cottage. It was early evening and the breeze had set the leaves chattering. Tito was listening to the old woman's garrulous ravings. She had spent a good day, and talked of his future, and though she held rein on her tongue, she spoke more freely than was her custom. Occasionally her mind wandered, and, for minutes at a time, she would lapse into meaningless gabble; then, as one starts from a light sleep, she would become conscious that her tongue was not under her control, and would furtively glance at the boy, lying on the grass at her feet, his eyes seeking the new coming stars, his quick ear drinking in every word that fell

TITO

from her lips. There had been a pause. She was lost in the confused memory of receding years. She spoke—her mind again that of a child.

“And we were so happy—we two, alone. In all the world there was not such happiness. I worked, aye, I slaved, that she might paint the pictures. But no one could draw the *Virgine* and the Child like my B—, like her. And she would sit in the galleries in dear *Firenza* through days and weeks, while I worked in the fields for the bits of cloth and the brushes. And with them, and the drop of oil, would she fashion the head of the *Cristo. Madonna!* What art was hers! It was life to her—it was all. Then he came. Ha, ha, ha, but he shall pay for it. Aye, he shall pay—with his blood.”

There followed mutterings, supplications to the saints to witness her vows of vengeance. Suddenly she turned to the boy who was silently storing in his memory every word she uttered.

“What hast thou heard, Tito? Of what have I talked? Ah! but thou shalt know, aye, in good time, in good time.”

Tito did not reply. There was a dreamy expression in the eyes he turned to the stars, to read there what was denied him; but he was deaf to the voices of the night which were beginning to disturb the soothing quiet, for his ear was tuned to the old woman’s voice that again broke the stillness.

“The silver and the bric-a-brac,—a prince’s ran-

TITO

som! That was mine, all mine. And he doesn't know the boy lives."

Her cackling laugh was like the echo of the cry of the damned. It seemed to rouse her.

"Tito, stand here where I may look at thee."

The boy rose and stood before her. Her eyes, like smouldering coals, gleamed through the dusk of the evening, and she nodded her head approvingly. "Yes, thou hast grown, for well have I nourished thee. It is almost time that thou shouldst know—and thou shalt. Thou wilt not forget thy vow? Remember what they call thee—'*Piccolo d'Ignoti*!' Does it not stir the blood in thy veins? Let me feel thy arm. Aye, it is hard. That is good. Thou canst strike, aye, and well, for have I not seen that scullion, Tammaso, when thou hast pummelled him? And the grass withered where his dirty blood spilled upon it. Thou didst well, my Tito, aye, well."

"Was my father fair like—like me?" he asked, then caught his breath sharply. His question roused the passion within her, and her words resolved into a stream of invectives.

"Listen, old woman," the boy cried, "thou wilt delay too long. If thou dost not tell me soon, I shall go to *Firenza*. There, I shall sing, for I can, —the good doctor in the village tells me I sing well. And I shall stand in the public squares and sing, and they will give me money. Then shall I go to America. *Sicuramenti*! And I shall find this coward father. And thou shalt know naught. That will not please thee, old woman."

TITO

"Thou must not leave me," she shrieked, "I, too, must go. I must see him when his own son has struck him, even to the heart. And I shall mock him, and ask him why he stole her from me. Thou wilt not deny me that, my Tito? It is for that I have lived. Thou wilt not!" she cried.

She clutched his arm and tried to rise. The pale moonlight gave to her features an unearthly, clay-white color. For a moment her passion gave her strength, then, with a moan, she sank into a chair. The boy looked at her in affright.

"Come," he said gently, "come within. Thou shalt rest, and then shalt thou tell me what I would know."

"Thou wilt not leave me, my Tito?" she wailed.

Without replying he helped the old woman into the house, and though he endeavored, by gentle questioning, to induce her to talk, he met with little success.

The morning sun streaming through the window awakened Tito. He arose and descended to the living room. All was quiet. He looked into the chamber occupied by Mother Malenotti. One look at the body on the bed was sufficient—the old woman had been dead for hours. No living being near her, in the quiet of the night she had died—her last cry one of vengeance. Tito stood beside the bed. No feeling of compassion or sorrow moved him as he gazed on the wrinkled features. Death had deepened the lines in her face, until its expression was unnatural, inhuman. The boy looked long and intently, but

TITO

with dry eyes, and a feeling only of regret that she carried with her the secret of his birth. His heart suggested no prayer; he thought not of God or of the hereafter into which her soul had been plunged, without warning, to meet her Maker. No time for repentance, no word or touch to ease her going, she had left her long life of hate,—her last thought, her last cry, one of revenge;—her only legacy to the child, her all-consuming hate for the father whose life the boy had sworn should wipe out the dishonor of his own birth.

Pietro, a week after the funeral, had returned to the fields, and young Tito sat alone before the house. For the past few days he had wandered aimlessly about through the fields and the woods, thinking much, for he realized the time had come when he should go into the world and make his own way alone, unaided. What was this world like? America was far away, yet he would go, for was it not there his father lived? Yes, he would go, and soon. He looked about him with a feeling of regret, for he would miss the flowers and the fields and the blue sky. Where was this city,—this New York? He would demand of the *parroco*, who should know. Within the hour he presented himself before the priest.

"Well, Little Devil, hast thou come at last to confess thy sins?"

"No," answered Tito, "when I have done that for which I am sorry, I will ask thee to absolve me. What I would know is where is this city of New York? How shall I go there?"

TITO

The priest laughed shrilly.

"What, little heretic, canst thou do in America? Thou canst neither read nor write."

"That is for me to decide," answered the boy stoutly. "What I would have thee tell me, is how I may get there. Shall I go to Genoa? There are many ships there."

"Thinkest thou, boy, it would not be well to make thy peace with God ere thou go on this journey? What know you of Heaven?"

The eyes that met the reproving glance of the priest did not waver.

"What has Heaven done for me?" demanded the boy. "Hast thou not called me 'Little Devil'? Hast this Heaven given me a father? Save thy word of advice for those who seek it. Good Father, thine is a trade that flourishes best when the crops fail. Did ever a man come to thee with a full stomach? Heaven is for those who need help; I only ask the way to America. If thou dost not tell me, I shall know that what the village doctor says of thee is true."

"What has he said, Little Devil?"

"That thou hast the wit of an ass. Also his voice. Tell me how I shall go to America?"

"The road thou art now travelling will lead thee to thy master, the Devil."

"Now, I believe the good doctor. I will go to him. Good bye, *Parroco*, we shall not meet again—unless you be sweeping the street crossing, and I pass that way."

"Well," said the doctor kindly, as Tito, hat in

TITO

hand, stood on the threshold of his office, "what now? You have not been indulging in your customary pastime?"

"I have not fought," the boy answered, a tinge of regret in his voice, "for two whole weeks. But it is no fault of mine. They run from me."

The doctor looked at him as an artist might regard his model—with admiring eyes.

"Tell me," said the boy, "tell me how I shall go to America."

"And wilt thou go?"

"Yes, and soon. I have money enough to take me there. When I reach America I shall work, and I shall find the father whom I have never seen."

The doctor smiled. He respected the boy's courage, for he had seen it proven. To attempt to turn him from his purpose he knew would be a waste of time; so, while Tito, with flushed cheeks and glowing eyes, listened, the good doctor told him what he would know. From Florence to Genoa—'twas but a step. There he would take a steamer for New York, and then—

"Ah!" sighed the boy with delight, "then—the rest is easy. Am I not strong? Thinkest thou I cannot work? Am I afraid? No! Fear is not for me!"

For hours after Tito returned home, he sat by the open door, pondering. He laid the disjointed fragments of knowledge which had come to him, facts he had gathered from the ravings of the old woman, before him; and by an ingenuity that was

TITO

uncommon in one of his years—even remarkable in its logical deductions—he fashioned them into an understandable whole. Connecting, bit by bit, the information he had accumulated, which he had retained in his memory, he was now in possession of a fair and concise outline of the history of Mother Malenotti's life from the time his father had entered it. His mother, he knew, was an artist. He was satisfied that New York was the home of his father—and that he was an aristocrat. The boy was even familiar with the names of certain localities in the city, and the old woman, in unguarded moments, had given such details of his father's personal appearance as to furnish the boy with a mental photograph of him, that was stamped upon his impressionable mind.

The journey to America he viewed with undaunted courage and determination, for confidence had come to him through social isolation and the necessity which forced him to depend upon his sturdy, physical strength. Ignorance of the world was to him at once a curse and a power that comes from lack of fear, and unfamiliarity with danger and hardships. Such ready money as was in the possession of Mother Malenotti at the time of her death, was his. This, with what Pietro had given him, was sufficient for his immediate needs, and to pay his passage to America; beyond that, he did not give a thought to the future. His strong arm gave him an arrogant self-reliance, and an enthusiasm born of childish disregard of consequence. But he was wise beyond his years, and

TITO

old in the philosophy that Nature teaches. Had the word of God been instilled into his heart, directing his young mind, he would have been capable of wonderful things. He was of the mould that has given to the world great men—men who have lived and have died for a principle. A malign fate had willed to him one thought, one emotion, one desire—revenge.

Entering the house, he carefully examined the few effects the old woman had left—two or three letters, yellow with age and worn by much handling; cheap trinkets of Italian make that she had preserved as mementos of her younger days; but it was a ring of unique design that attracted the boy and aroused his curiosity. The stone of the ring had been removed, and inside the slender hoop of gold was the name—Bettina. The letters the boy burned—not knowing their value. The ring and a small picture of the *Madonna*, in oil, a few inches of canvas tacked on a wooden frame—mementos of the home of his childhood—these were all he wished to retain.

Two days later, with a third-class ticket to Florence, he stood at the station with Maria's hand in his own. Their tears mingled, but they were blind to those who watched them and smiled.

The train puffed into the station. There was an exchange of promises, a parting kiss, and Tito began his journey.

CHAPTER X.

THE two hours' railroad journey from his old home to the city of Florence gave Tito a taste of the world that he was entering. After having been jostled at the station, and crowded in the dingy compartment of the railroad carriage, he regarded the passengers with looks which did not invite intimacy, and his bearing was not calculated to enlist their sympathies. They wore the peasant's garb and were dirty and unkempt. Tito watched them first with disdain, then with disgust. It is not your feelings that interest mankind in general; it is what you are unfortunate enough not to hide that concerns the observing. Tito did not dissemble—the appearance of his fellow-travelers did not please him, he had never been trained to disguise his feelings, and they could read on his face that he considered himself much too good for the company he was in. Having regulated their social status by eye, one of his fellow travelers, a burly youth with a wooden expression of countenance, and a bullet-shaped head on heavy shoulders, addressed Tito. He was the boy's senior by several years and of unquestioned insolence.

“Where dost thou go, young one, with thy

TITO

cherub face?" There was studied offence in the tone.

"Not whence you came—from a piggery," answered Tito.

"Thou hadst best cultivate a more civil tongue," retorted the other hotly.

"I might if you had learned to respect your betters." Tito's tone was not pacific.

Their eyes flashed their unspoken opinions. The other passengers lent approval and encouragement.

"Canst thou not read thy ticket, *Angioletto*?" the stranger asked, the appellation being a chance shot. Tito's countenance became scarlet.

"Yes," he retorted angrily, "as readily as your dolt face. It will be best for your wooden head if you mind your own affairs."

The guard interrupted this exchange of pleasantries. The train was drawing into the station at Florence.

It was early evening and he walked boldly along the crowded streets. Having eaten nothing since noontime, he was hungry, but though he did not appreciate the value of money, he knew its purchasing power. Approaching a fruit store, he instinctively put his hand into the pocket of his trousers—fruit cost money. He stopped suddenly, and a blank stare of amazement overspread his features—his purse was gone.

The passersby looked with a show of curiosity, and some little interest, at the fair-haired youth standing on the sidewalk, gazing into space, un-

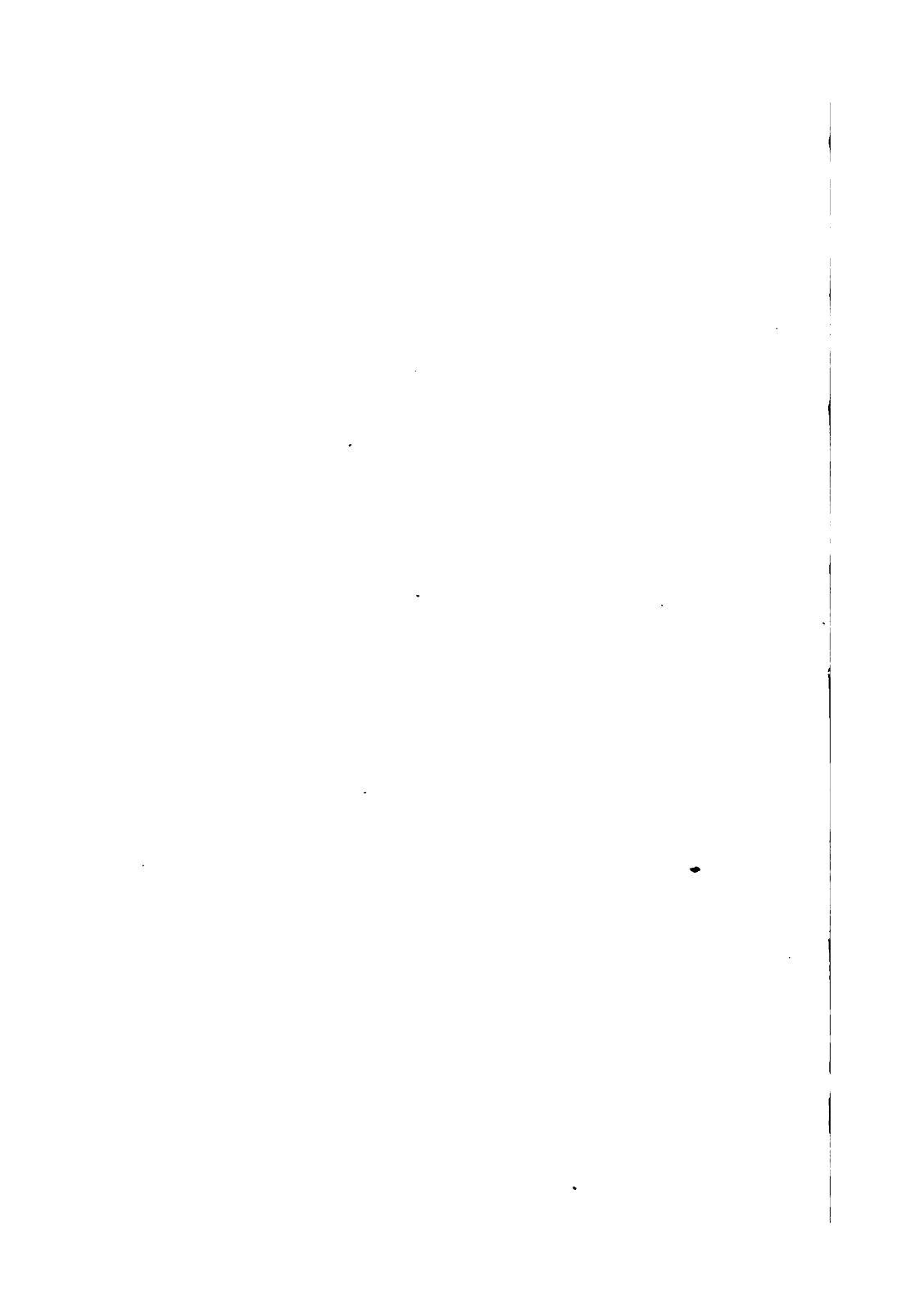
TITO

mindful of their admiring glances. The boy had received his first unkind jolt to remind him that the world guards those whose diligence never slumbers. He was paying the penalty of ignorance of the ways of large cities. He did not mourn—he had yet to fully appreciate his position, without money, and knowing no one in the city. A smile lighted up his face, and not a few turned for a second time to look at the boy, standing with hands thrust into his pockets. Alone, penniless, supperless, and hungry—he was certain that never before had he been quite so hungry—yet he laughed aloud.

The streets were brilliant with lights; well dressed people hurried on their way to theatre and opera; the stores and restaurants were filled with life and gaiety; and the light fell aslant the face of the boy who found amusement in the contemplation of his loss. "*Diavolo*," he laughed, "they should have left with me enough for supper. Did I know the thief I would ask of him a few *soldi* with which to buy soup, aye, and some fruit—as a loan. *Satana!* scullion! Not a sou left! What a beast he is! I have not enough to buy me one orange—one very small orange. Now, were it he of the wooden face—that clod of the fields who taunted me on the train, I would pummel him, aye, so that he would not know his own ill-favored visage in the glass. I could make putty of that face, even though he had not my purse. I must have the worth of the good gold pieces that were mine. Did I know how to pray, I would say,



"SILENT, BREATHLESS, A LOOK OF RAPTURE ON HIS FACE."
(Page 81.)



TITO

Heaven guide him across my path. But the money—I have it not, and America is far away. That it is, and there I must go, but how? I know naught of work, and besides I am as empty as a pail that has stood in the sun,—as empty as are my pockets. Some one must feed me, but who? Let me see. Tito, thou of the angel face,” he laughed softly, “a hot soup, some fruit and,—and coffee, cheese and a tumbler of wine. What thinkest thou of that? Verily a feast! That, some one must give me. I have never gone hungry, nor shall I. A lodging? That will come after. America? That shall be for to-morrow.”

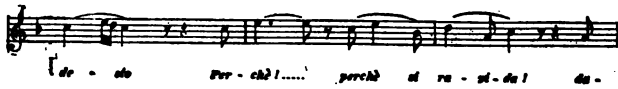
He was standing opposite a fashionable café. Dinner was being served, and the music of a mandolin orchestra came through the open doors and windows. Never had he heard such music. It rose and fell and died to low whispers. The boy listened as if the gates of Heaven had been thrown open—the flood of music and the flashing lights being a taste of the unknown. His eyes seemed to bulge from their sockets as, with an expression of indefinable pleasure, he stood as one transformed—silent, breathless, a look of rapture on his face. He was wholly unconscious of where he was; to the crowd that surged about him he gave no more attention than if he were alone in the fields and the woods, with the stars his only companions; nor did he see the admiration on the faces of those who paused to look at him, his face and figure rivaling the beauty of the marble gods on the pedestals of the *Uffizi*. To him, at that moment,

TITO

the strains of music to which he listened with an intoxication of delight were all that appealed to thought or understanding. The orchestra was playing a pot-pourri of popular airs, the melodies that stir the blood of the impulsive Italian. After some minutes the notes of a folk-song were borne to the ears of Tito, and his voice rose in the familiar strains he had heard the peasants chant at their labor. A crowd gathered about him, for his voice was that of an artist—ringing out in tones that vibrated on the night air—the last note lingering in a cadence of marvelous beauty.



TITO



The song finished, unabashed, he looked at the crowd about him, a smile lighting up his face. A shout of approval was followed by a shower of coin, that many hands gathered from the pavement to give to him. Laughing gleefully, he jingled the money in his pockets, and was about to turn away, when a waiter from the café accosted him.

"They would have thee within," he was informed.

"But I will eat," he laughed, "after which—"

"But thou wilt eat within, and well."

"Good," he replied, "then will I come."

They went into the café, and the best was set before him. He needed no urging. The guests,

TITO

mostly artists, watched the boy, marveling, meantime, at his beauty, which his peasant garb, by contrast, only accentuated, while Tito's eyes said plainly, "I am well content to be here, and thou art much honored."

"*Mio Dio!* What eyes! He shall sit for me." It was a Florentine artist who spoke.

"What insolence is there in his expression!" whispered his companion. "The lines of the neck and the poise of the head—he might be a noble. What do they call thee?" the speaker asked.

"'Little Angel!'—'Little Devil,'" Tito answered with a laugh. The wine had lent a flush to his cheeks, and his eyes shone with added brilliancy. "Those whom I do not please call me by another name, but for that they must fight me."

He had risen from his seat, and stood before them with head thrown back in the manner that was wont to make Mother Malenotti rage. He was conscious of his strength, and the many faces against the background of splendor did not disconcert him.

"Where hast thou learned to sing?" they asked. There was kindly concern mixed with respect in the voice.

"How can I tell?" answered the boy, "I sing as the birds sing. They are not taught, they cannot help singing. Yes, I will sing for thee—till my voice crack; but thou shalt give me what they have robbed me of,—the money that was to take me to America."

"See, 'Little Devil'! the name suits thee well—

TITO

thou shalt come to me daily, and I will paint thy portrait."

"No," answered the boy, "that I will not."

"But the money to take thee to America?"

"That will I have to-night. Listen!"

The orchestra was again playing, and the boy, picking up the melody, sang it to the end. His was the art that Nature teaches, and his voice was one that, in a moment of profligacy, she had bestowed upon him. It was the heaven-sent gift that no art can imitate,—a power that is given to but few. There was a liquid flexibility in his tones, and a command so perfect that his hearers listened enthralled. What wonderful beauty was in that voice, the faces of those who heard testified. For the moment, to the eye and to the ear, he was a divinity—his features those of an angel, his figure that of a young Hercules; but his mischievous expression of boyish deviltry broke the charm.

The last note was followed by a series of bravos. Silver coin and not a few bits of gold, were his reward. He counted his money,—he had more than he had lost.

"You will sing again?"

"Yes," he answered, "when it pleases me. You have given me that which is mine; with it, I shall go to America. When I sing again you shall not give me money, for I have now what was taken from me. If there is a favor I might ask, it is that you find me the dolt who stole my money, that I may beat him."

They sketched him standing in the glow of the

TITO

lights, his eyes and cheeks aflame with excitement, tingling with joy at the knowledge that he had done well.

It was midnight when he went to a modest hotel where he slept the sleep of the young and the healthy.

Early the next morning he was astir. The city was awakening lazily and with reluctance, presenting a brilliant panorama to the eyes and the mind of the boy. The cool, clear morning air sent the blood dancing through his veins; and the sun's rays painted the distant Apennines a hazy purple. He thought but little of his mission or his prospective journey—enough for him that he lived, that he breathed, that he felt his pulses quicken; for what he saw filled him with new and wonderful delight; and he paused in his walk to gaze with wonder on the wealth of beauty spread before him. While he looked at the picture framed by the distant hills and blue above, for one moment his heart and his mind were nearer God than they had ever been during his young life. The influence of the mystery of creation, the works of art and of nature, sublime in their matchless beauty, left him speechless. He caught his breath sharply, for a spell of enchantment was upon him.

Entering one of the galleries, he gazed long and earnestly at the art treasures; for even he, young as he was, and untrained, could appreciate the marvels of art that he saw. A Raffaello, a Michelangelo, a Correggio, spoke to him a new language. He looked upon the portrait of the *Madonna* and

TITO

the Child. His mother, perhaps she, too, had stood here as he now stood, and gazed with the same feeling of rapture—the lovely Bettina, whom even the old woman had power to describe as one rivaling in beauty these very works of art—the portraits that looked down upon him. The first tears that the memory of that mother had ever awakened stole to his eyes—the first longing throbs of love quickened his heart-beats. Gazing at the portrait of the *Madonna*, he mentally pictured the fair Italian girl—she who had given her young life at his birth. From its hiding place, in an inner pocket of his coat, he drew the small bit of canvas which was all that was left to him of his mother's work of love, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it reverently. Into his face came a spiritual expression, and those near him forgot the works of the dead masters to observe the face of the boy, who, unconscious of all the world, looked with tender, lingering love upon the memento of his mother's skill. Regretfully, and with loving touch, he replaced the picture in his pocket, and with a sigh that was half a sob walked away.

Turning abruptly into one of the galleries, he came face to face with the artist, who, the night before, had begged him to sit for a portrait. The artist recognized Tito at once, and a smile of pleasure played about the corners of his mouth.

"Well, 'Little—"

"Devil," said Tito, promptly.

"I have been thinking of thee and the journey thou wilt take. Tell me! Why not stay here in

TITO

Florence, where that voice of thine might be heard, until something could be made of it to which the world would listen? America is not for thee. There the artist in thee will be starved. Thou wilt be as the flower that dies, because the sun is forbidden it, or that the dew kisses to life, to be withered by the blast of the noonday heat. What wouldst thou of America?"

The boy's eyes flashed. The blood surged to his cheek, for the thought of his mission to America brought with it a fierce gust of passion. In memory, he was again with the old woman—her rasping tones grating on his hearing, until every evil element was aroused, and every nerve in his body responded to the fury that took possession of him. He remembered now, that, which for one hour he had forgotten, his mission—his revenge.

"*Mio Dio!* Stand as thou art for one little minute until I sketch thee. Thou art truly named, 'Little Devil.' Tell me what I may say to make the fire dance in thine eyes? They have the depth of expression, and the liquid tenderness of our own *Italia*. The flames of hell could not shoot such gleams. Ah! I have it. *Divino!* Truly thou art of *Italia*—but thy fair skin?"

This last was as a match to a train of gunpowder. The artist looked in astonishment, for his ears, tuned though they were to the license of his craft, and the free speech of compatriots of his calling, as well as models of all classes or of no class at all, stood amazed, while he listened to the volley of oaths that fell from the lips of the boy.

TITO

"Verily, *L'inferno!* but sublime! If thou wilt stay here in *Firenza* till I get the fire of those eyes onto canvas—thou canst name thy price. What sayest thou, boy?"

"That for all the wealth of *Firenza* I would not remain."

"Come," said the artist, as he laid aside his unfinished work, "it is time to eat. Thou shalt eat with me, and we will talk, and thou shalt tell me of thyself."

Together they walked to a café in the *Via Tornabuoni*. Here they seated themselves, and over their coffee Tito's artist friend heard the boy's story. With his eyes fixed on the mobile countenance before him, Tito's companion listened enraptured and, with the instinct of the true artist, watched the boy's changing expression that voiced his thoughts more eloquently than his tongue had the power to do; and the artist read his life story on his face—the intense passion, the flashes of tenderness, the eyes that spoke in dumb eloquence of a soul starved, distorted, groping in the dark for an outlet for his affection,—seeking the love that it craved.

"But why surrender thyself, thy life, to this hate, this passion, this revenge? If thou hast no father—*perbacco!* thou hast no father! What of it?" The artist's voice was bantering. He did not desire to offend the boy. He regarded him as a find—a discovery, one in whom was the power to accomplish great things. His only desire was to turn him from his determination to sacrifice his

TITO

energy, his life; for he could read faces, characters, and he recognized in Tito the promise of a great future.

"And thou wilt go?" the artist asked.

"Yes. That will I. And this New York—knowest thou of it?"

"It is a great city of many people. Riches they have—aye, untold wealth—but art—pooh! They measure art by the tradesman's tape. Their God is not thine. They will not understand thee, nor thou them. The artist in thee will rebel—thou wilt cry aloud for the blue of the sky, the fragrance, the beauty of our own *Italia*. They will not feel what thou dost now, and the soul within thee will wither. Stay with me, my son, and thou shalt study art—the art that is thy master."

"I will come back, perhaps, but it shall be when I have washed the stain from my blood, when I shall have heard the coward father cry out with pain—when he hears me tell him that I—Tito, his son, have avenged her whom he was ashamed to acknowledge. My mother! Beautiful! Aye! The old woman has told me,—with eyes like those of the *Madonna* in the galleries. She, too, was an artist, as thou art. See!" he cried, drawing the bit of canvas from his pocket. "Is not that art? If it is not, then am I blind. Must not her hand have been small and beautiful to have drawn the lines? Must not her touch have been gentle as an angel's to have wrought such beauty? Canst thou not see her as I see her, standing before the portrait of the *Madonna*, with her eyes uplifted, with the

TITO

beauty that the gods give? For it is so that I pictured her, with cheeks that the sun had kissed to a peach blow. Had I the art, I could paint her as the old woman described her; for even she, with her devil's tongue, made of her one that beauty had touched not lightly."

He leaned across the table at which they sat and poured forth his soul in words to which his companion listened, enraptured by their impassioned fervor. The ears of the artist drank in the music of the boy's voice, while his eyes were riveted on the face before him, flushed with emotions he did not seek to hide.

"Yes," was the reply as Tito paused. "I see as thou seest, aye, and feel the power that moves thee, for it is the artist within thee, as well as the son, that speaks. *Mio Dio!* What a fortune might be thine! Stay with me, let me teach thee, *fanciullo, mio*—for the fire within is consuming thee. Thou shalt be my son, and thou, too, shalt paint—as thy mother did—unless I have lost the trick of my calling. Listen to reason! Thou canst not wipe out this wrong—that cannot be. Thou art giving thy young life to a cause that is empty—empty as the vacuum in a bubble that is blown into air. This old woman has filled thee with a desire to avenge thy mother—as senseless as the vendetta of our own race. Stay here, my son, and thou shalt be great, famous, I promise thee; for though thou hast the passion that gave thee thy name—'Little Devil'—there slumbers the soul of a Michelangelo within thee. Stay, and forget—"

TITO

"Nay," cried the boy with flashing eyes, "that I will not! This father—he is an aristocrat, a noble. I shall ask him why he brought me into the world. I shall cry out to him—'Look at me, thou coward! Seest thou the stamp of shame on me? Canst thou rub it away?' And I shall taunt him, and he will cringe, and, maybe, he will offer me money—as he would to a beggar. And I shall throw it in his face! Do you hear? In his face!"

For a moment, he was, in memory, again in the cottage by the roadway, and the wrinkled visage of the old woman rose before him—grinning with an expression of fiendish glee—her words echoing on the summer stillness, "Remember thy promise, my Tito, remember what they call thee—"

The boy's hand fell upon the table and instinctively clutched the knife that lay upon it. The eyes of his companion followed the movement, and with a sigh he rose.

"He must work out his own destiny," he mused. "He is a god!" "Enough," he said aloud, "come, I have much to do, but it must wait. Thou shalt go with me, and I will point out the masters that thou wilt love and serve. Thou shalt have one little taste of art, of beauty that is not mortal."

Together they walked in the direction of the *Uffizi*.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD was steadily at work in Tito's heart and mind, persistently refusing to be crowded or crushed by the elements of viciousness that had been instilled into his mind by the baneful influence of Mother Malenotti. Knocking at the door of his conscience, and appealing to his understanding, were feelings that baffled him, and set his emotions into a riot. An impulse for good would rise in him only to be met and put aside by a power stronger than his will—a power fostered by years of wilfulness, and passions that had never known restraint. Nature whispered her secrets to him, and the ear of his imagination had, day by day, been assailed by thoughts and dreams that the beauties of the world engendered. Of an imaginative and artistic temperament, since the old woman's death, the influence of nature and of art had been making itself felt; and emotions, which he could not understand, were results of his inner subconscious nature asserting itself.

The artist and the boy went toward the *Uffizi*. They walked slowly, the artist talking gently, even affectionately; pointing out and explaining what would be of interest and benefit to him. They had

TITO

turned south from the café and entered the cathedral. Standing where they could look upon the sweep of the vast edifice, Tito's companion watched him narrowly to observe its effect upon him. It was the first time in his young life that he had ever entered a church, for although Mother Malenotti, in her own way, professed the Catholic faith, it had been her care to turn the boy's mind from all religious thought and influence. He had conceived a terrible, all powerful God, who visited his wrath on those who felt not the sacredness of an oath. The good within him came from natural instincts, not from teaching or example. As they entered the church and stood near the door, Tito was lost in contemplation of the grandeur before him; but it appealed to the material, not to the spiritual, side of his nature.

"What is this God?" he asked with the candor of his years. "He has done naught for me. I see all this beauty! Yes, truly, but it is not His work. The hand of man wrought this,—aye, and they are dead. What did this God do for them? Tell me that! If I ask Him for the purse that was mine, He does not give it to me. Why, then, should I give Him thanks? For being robbed by some *malandrino* who, on a feast day, will drop one of my good coins into the poor-box? And the thief will be blessed for it. And could I not sing, would I not have gone hungry?"

The artist smiled. He, himself was not of ardent belief; and the boy's talk amused him.

TITO

"Truly," he said, "thou art a little *pagano*. Yet these things come to thee. See! Do not these works of art speak to thee of a power greater than man's? Our hands and brains are only the instruments, the tools that, by His divine will, have been given us to perform these miracles of art. Dost thou not feel the power, boy? Does not this beauty speak to thee and stir the heart of the artist? The little devil within thee is of the flesh—but thy soul, has it not spoken yet?"

The boy did not reply. He was lost in a newly discovered heaven. He did not hear his companion, and his eyes told that the spell of beauty, of the art of creation, was upon him. For that one moment his inner conscience controlled his faculties, his being. The mystery of the conception of the soul was being wrought, and the emotions that filled him seemed to paralyze all else.

The artist's eyes were fixed upon the boy's face. "*Madonna Mia*," he muttered, "a *Tiziano* would cry aloud could he behold that face—the tender lines of an angel, with the eyes of a young demon."

Still the boy, speechless, gazed at the wonders before him. At length, with a soft, prolonged sigh, he turned to the artist.

"Come," he said, "let us go."

They went out into the bright sunlight, the spell still at work on Tito's mind—the germ of faith had taken root. Crossing the *Palazzo Vecchio*, they entered the *Galleria degli Uffizi*. Each picture, statue and work of art, was, to the artist, as an old

TITO

acquaintance, and he led the boy to those which most strongly appealed to him. Pausing before Lippi's *Virgine*, the artist waited for Tito to speak, for when he had shown him the copy, his mother's work, the artist had recognized it as a reproduction of the famous painting—he had noted, too, that it was of a high order of merit.

One look at the original and Tito drew forth the canvas from his pocket, and a smile, tender, loving, yet sorrowful, lighted up his countenance. "Look," he cried, pointing to the portrait with suppressed excitement, "this was her model. Is not the copy wonderful? Here, then, was where she worked, where she stood—even as I now stand,—her son! I, who am to avenge the wrong she suffered. It was here that he, perhaps, first met her. Ah! my mother, why couldst thou not have lived until the day when I would say to thee—'See! thy son hast avenged thee, for the blood that flows in my veins is of *Italia*.'"

Gazing long and lovingly, but with a critical eye, at the portrait he held, he turned to the original. The spirit of the artist spoke in every look, every gesture. His companion, at some distance from him, watched the constantly changing expression on the boy's face.

"I, too," he resumed, "may do these things. Why cannot I paint the images? If this father gave to me his fair skin, have I not the Italian blood of my mother?" Turning to his companion, he impulsively added: "Thou shalt teach me, but

TITO

not now. When I return to dear *Italia*, when this father shall have felt the sting of my knife—then shalt thou teach me thy art. Thinkest thou I could learn?"

"Yes," was the reply, while the artist's eyes rested on the upturned face with tender regard. "I shall teach thee, for thou hast thy mother's soul. Thou shalt learn, and I shall paint thy portrait, *fanciullo mio*, if the world does not rob thee of the fire in those eyes. But in America thou wilt become indifferent to the beauties the good God gave to us, and when thou wilt come back to *Italia*, thou wilt not care for it, nor for the art that thou now lovest. Thou wilt be like the birds that would sing but cannot, because their tongues are withered, and their voices are hushed; and only the memories of their young lives are left them."

The boy did not answer and they turned to go.

"Think well of what I have told thee," the artist said as they neared the Arno.

The sun was sinking behind the purple hills, and a golden haze hung over river and valley. The warm glow bathed the tower of the *Palazzo Vecchio* in a languorous flood of shimmering gold; and a buzz of life arose in response to the call of approaching evening.

Tito's pulses throbbed with pleasure at the sights and the sounds, for Florence was astir to drink in the beauty. The words of the artist, as much as what he had seen and heard, had made a deep impression upon him. Though the effect

TITO

might not be lasting, new thoughts and new emotions had taken possession of his heart and mind.

But here again chance rudely interfered—for, as they approached the *Ponte Vecchio*, the young peasant who had taunted Tito in the railway carriage, stood, not fifty feet away, in the act of purchasing some confections from a street vender, in his hand Tito's missing purse. The concentrated passions of his lifetime seemed to take possession of the boy. With catlike stride he stood before the offender and, before the culprit had time to secrete the purse, wrenched it from his hand.

"You thief! You beast! You clod of the fields!" There was a hush, and his voice rang clear, "Now will I teach you better graces!"

With clenched fist he struck out boldly, and the offender sprawled on the pavement at his feet. Rising clumsily, he faced the enraged Tito, but again he measured his length on the stone pavement, blood flowing from his face.

Now it is no uncommon sight to see the naturally indolent and easy-going Florentines indulging in a wordy war, gesticulating wildly and, to one not acquainted with the Italian temperament, seemingly on the point of coming to blows; but, as a rule, words are their only weapons. They entertain a wholesome fear of the law, which frowns upon those who would question its supremacy, not even countenancing what might be deemed an act of self-defence.

TITO

Tito's belligerent act brought about him a crowd who were mightily pleased, for their sympathies went out to the fair-haired youth whose eyes shot gleams of defiance at the awkward countryman; but it also brought the *Guardia di Citta* and, before he realized it, he was in the stern clutches of the law. An impromptu investigation immediately followed. Tito's friend, who stood behind him to champion his cause, calmly received the marked courtesies which the officials of law and order paid to him, for his name was a power. The boy was in no conciliatory frame of mind. He was ready to continue the battle, but a restraining hand grasped him by the collar of his coat. The officer, having set in motion the machinery of his civic authority, demanded the cause of the breach of peace.

"This swine-herder," volunteered Tito, indicating his adversary with a finger of scorn, "stole my purse, with the good gold that was mine; and he has dared show it to me that I may know he had it in his filthy pocket. And thou," he continued, addressing the officer, "with all thy fierce mustachios and rusty sword, which is good only to slit a cabbage, if thou ever earned the hundred *lire* the government pays thee, this bullet-headed pig could not have stolen my good gold."

The crowd roared with delight and Tito glared upon him of the bloody face.

"What have you to say?" asked the officer, of the object of Tito's wrath. A closer grip at the

TITO

nape of Tito's neck warned him that he would yet answer for his freedom of speech. The peasant, with dogged persistence, denied the imputation of theft. He had found the purse. As he had come by it honestly, the money was his.

"Now," retorted Tito, "will I beat you twice, you lying thief! Wait till it pleases these white-gloved warriors to release me, and will I paint your face again with your dirty blood."

"Cease this," cried the officer, "what do they call thee?"

"Tito," he replied, meeting the officer's glance unflinchingly.

"What else?"

"Just Tito. 'Little Devil,' if you like it better."

"Thou art rightly named. Listen to me, 'Little Devil.' If thou wilt promise to behave thyself and learn to cultivate a civil tongue, I may let thee go."

"I promise nothing but to beat that swine-herder when I next meet him."

"Shall I take thee before the Commissioner of Police?"

"Do," replied Tito, "that I may tell him thy worth."

The artist spoke to the officer, who, with a military salute, released Tito, and, promising to be in court the following morning, they went on their way.

The artist smiled. Another side of the boy's nature had been revealed to him. What element in his nature would eventually assume the mas-

TITO

tery? This he asked himself as they walked together, and he listened to the boy's outpouring of passion. "He will rise to great things," he mused, "either for good or for evil. It will be as Fate directs. If chance throws him in the way of good, he will absorb it readily. He is like a flower of wonderful promise, till its rank growth threatens to strangle it, for he has his mother's beauty and talent, with an indomitable will and a daring courage. Does he take this from his father, and they ever meet—then will there be a tragedy indeed."

"Tell me of thy mother," he said to the boy. They were leaning against the *spalletta*, the turbulent Arno at their feet singing in fitful rhythm, while the night shadows closed in upon them. Tito told what he knew,—his voice, tuned to a low pitch, falling upon the ear of his listener with a measured, musical cadence, that was as the echo of the song he had sung the night before. Passion seemed to have died into sorrow, and the tones of his voice, more than his words, told that the subject touched him deeply. Neither did the mention of Mother Malenotti seem to stir the rage which reference to her commonly awakened, and his manner, subdued, dejected, was that of one who feels keenly the want of a love he has never known. At times, when he described the home that yet rose vividly to his mind, his language grew eloquent, and he painted a word picture that stood out clear, distinct, poetic in its unstudied, uncon-

TITO

scious realism. He spoke of the old woman without feeling, for, although memories of her still rankled in his young heart, he seemed imbued with a feeling in which sorrowful remembrance stifled all other emotions. "And now," he continued, while the first stars, through a rift in the line made by the frowning Apennines, told that they had talked till night was with them, "and now, I have nothing but the legacy of hate the old woman willed to me. Who am I? Who was the mother that is dead? Some one who was young and of great beauty. Who is the father that is living? The old woman has told me that he lives. Who am I? Tito, just Tito. If thou shouldst ask me further, I cannot tell, unless I add, *fanciullo*, or *Piccolo d'Ignoti*. *Madonna Mia*, that it should be so—or worse, that it be true."

He laughed. Again he was the young Tuscan in the valley of the Arno. Again the fierce passion returned, and body and soul surrendered to its influence.

"If it be true—what would they do to a son, who, with his father's lifeblood dripping from his knife, should cry out, 'See! It is I, Tito, who have done this?'"

A pause followed, that only the hum of the city disturbed, until broken by the artist.

"Don't, boy, don't!" his voice was filled with horror. "Think thou of thy God!"

"My God? I think of my mother! My mother—" A sob broke on the stillness, and the

TITO

night shadows hid the tears that ran down the cheeks of the boy.

The river sang its song and rushed heedlessly on. It seemed but yesterday that it had listened to the cries of the great Savonarola as he burned at the stake; and its waters had borne his ashes to the sea. Centuries were as but years, but days. To sorrow it lent no ear, and time rolled on unnoted.

To the two silent figures, night spoke a language they understood.

CHAPTER XII.

IT was high noon. From the stern of an ocean steamer, Tito looked across the smooth waters of the harbor of Genoa, at the city, rising in a gleaming semi-circle from the water's edge—a vast amphitheatre in white, decorated at its base by a fringe of masts, from which the water in the inner harbor seemed to hang, a curtain of blue that merged with the green of the gulf.

The steamer was to touch at Naples, and from that point was to proceed to New York. Coming aboard early, Tito had seen and learned much. He was in the steerage, and for the past four hours he had been on the ship, long enough, however, to get into an altercation with one of the passengers, to be twice ordered from the bow, which was forbidden territory, and to designate a deck hand, who had inconsiderately jostled him, as a Neapolitan pig. This did not augur well for his peace and comfort during the trip, but he refused to seriously consider these little incidents, and he leaned against the rail lost in contemplation of the beauties of the receding shore. He would arrive in New York nearly, if not quite, penniless; but this seemed a matter too remote to consider. Enough for him that the sky had never seemed so

TITO

blue, and the sea was something new and enchantingly beautiful—the air sighing through the rigging in fitful little gusts, the water singing its lapping refrain at bow and stern. What propelled the ship was a mystery yet to be solved; and he had serious designs on the captain's bridge. Surmising that this point of vantage was forbidden, he would watch his opportunity; for rules, even on shipboard, are made to be broken, and he determined to tread the sacred boards of the captain's perch. The punishment! Pooh! That was in the future.

When the city had become but a white speck, and the shore a broken line on the horizon, he turned his attention to the passengers. They were a picturesque crowd from the provinces of northern Italy, types of the peasant class, fantastically attired, and many of them spoke a patois which the boy could not understand. With the instinct of the artist he noted the details of each face and figure, and, as they stood huddled close together, like a flock of sheep, he determined to sketch them. He had procured in Florence paper and pencil, for he, too, would draw, he would make pictures and, when he returned to Florence, the master who had spoken to him of art and of the soul, should see them.

During the last few years of the old woman's life she had been given to talking aloud, and her fear that she would betray the secret of Tito's birth prompted her to speak in the broken English

TITO

which, during her visit to America, and in listening to Vanburg as he taught Bettina his native tongue, she had been able to acquire. With the quick ear of childhood, and with the avidity of one to whom knowledge is denied, he had learned a fair amount of the language.

He listened to the few among the passengers who could speak English—fellow countrymen who were returning to America after a visit to their native land, and their words, together with their facial expressions and wild gestures, carried understanding to his mind.

Thus the time was occupied, and the drowsy Mediterranean sighed as she slept, and lifted the ship with gentle pulsations. The breezes sighed ravishingly, and the sun beat down on the throng lying at full length upon the deck, dreaming of the land of beauty which they had left, and of the wonderful land of promise and of gold to which each turn of the screw brought them nearer. The ship entered the bay which is without peer, and they were at Naples. Here, more countrymen came aboard, and Tito liked them less. A Neapolitan, even in his own country, is not regarded with favor, for the quintessence of filth and poverty does not tend to make a race of people that might be termed idealistic. The beauty that nature, with whimsical disregard of the law of equation, was pleased to heap with startling profligacy under the shadow of Vesuvius, as yet, apparently, had not touched the populace. The lowest order, as a

TITO

class, are not good to look upon, and a closer intimacy is productive of less delight. As a rule, however, the Italians of the poorer class are examples of true gentleness, in comparison with those of other and greater nations,—notwithstanding the ever ready stiletto.

“What is it that burns?” asked Tito of one of the newly arrived, indicating the cap of smoke that topped Vesuvius.

“That! That’s hell burning.”

The boy considered the answer frivolous.

“How dare you stray so far from home?” he queried. His informant looked at him dubiously. “You have been to America?” questioned Tito.

“Yes.”

“It has not sharpened your wits. Of English you know something—a leetle, a very leetle, eh? Talk to me in the language they speak in America.”

“You understand?” queried the other in English.

“Yaas,” the boy affirmed, unblushingly, then continued: “While you talk, I will, with this pencil, make on paper a picture of your face, but much better favored than your own; and as you talk more, so will I add to your beauty—on paper. Understand?” (This is English.)

“What is thy picture to me? I could not buy a plate of soup with it.”

“The worth is not in your ugly face, but in my drawing of it. I shall make of it what your Maker

TITO

never intended—something that your master, the devil, would disown. Beauty is not with you. I will add it. Hold your head to one side so the light may not show its ugly lines. Now, talk to me the best English you may know.”

With a sure touch and a rapid hand Tito sketched the dark visage of his subject, standing by the ship’s side, against a background of cloudless sky to which the coming twilight lent a deeper blue. His model regarded the boy with respect and some degree of awe.

“There,” said Tito, handing the rough sketch to him, “could your mirror do as well for you, then might you believe in the miracles. This I will give you, and for it you shall talk English to me every day till we come to America. Tell me now of this New York. Is it like Florence or Genoa?”

“America is good for work,” was the reply. “New York is a great city, and rich! But to live? Bah! They know not how to live! You must be of the government, of the police, then everything comes to you. What doest thou there, boy? Thou wilt work, aye, there is much to do, but thou must pay one-half thou wilt earn as a tribute.”

“To whom?” demanded Tito with large-eyed interest.

“To the police—to whom else?”

“That will I not,” answered the boy, stoutly. “They shall feed me, and if it amuse me, I shall draw their pictures as I drew yours. These pictures will not be true, but they will please them;

TITO

and they shall know me as 'Little Devil,' for I love them not." And with a princely wave of his hand, he terminated his audience with his fellow countryman, who, already, treated him with the consideration that his youthful arrogance demanded.

Gibraltar had become a memory. The coast of Spain had died into a hazy mist that merged with sky and sea, and the Atlantic welcomed the voyagers with heaving bosom and threatening mien. The wind blew, and huge waves boarded the ship and swept the decks from bow to stern. The passengers, all but one, were locked below, and, as the gale increased, prayed and shrieked upon their knees, and called upon the *Madonna* to intercede with the High Power, to preserve them from the storm's fury. I say all but one were locked below. That one, by an ingenuity which called down upon his fair head the wrath of the officers, had eluded their vigilance; and only by the miraculous hand of Providence had he escaped death. He had been picked up unconscious, after having been dashed against the ship's rail, and was conveyed to the first cabin saloon. Here, in the presence of a number of the passengers he opened his eyes, and, with a patronizing smile, demanded how he came to be so favored. His wet hair, clinging to his fair forehead, enlisted the admiration of the passengers, but the ship's officer was unmoved.

"'Little Devil,' how did you come to be on deck?" the officer demanded.

Tito smiled sweetly. He ignored the question

TITO

and asked calmly, "How comes it that thou shouldst call me by my name? I had not told thee."

"Answer me!" A subordinate would have quailed before the officer's tone.

Tito, undisturbed, chuckled gleefully. He did not underestimate the look of interest and of admiration on the faces of the spectators. "You can guess my name, then shouldst thou know that I was on deck to see that everything was right. Thou mayest have observed that there is a storm without and much wind, and the ship's boats are loose on their davits. Look to it, that they are made fast. Wouldst thou have me tell thee more? If it pleases thee, I will return to the hole below. There will I teach the cattle to pray more loudly. The *Madonna* cannot hear with the storm."

"You little fiend, I will report you to the captain."

"I can save thee that trouble. When the wind dies, I shall go on to the bridge. I think it will please me."

"What is your name?" This from a sympathetic passenger.

"Does not my face tell thee? Angioletto—Tito, for short. If neither name pleases thee, ask him of the gold braid and brassy tongue. It clangs like a bell—that the sheep wear. He had wit enough to guess truly—'Little Devil.' Now shall I go. I can hear them praying even here. I would join them."

TITO

The intervention of the passengers appeased the officer's wrath, and Tito was led away to the steerage, his laugh, which the roar of the storm could not wholly drown, dying into a musical echo.

The storm spent its force and died into fretful complaining, and the wind and the sea agreed that calm should reign. The sun, with a mighty effort, dissolved the gloom; and those below, assured that life was yet for them, crept sheepishly to the deck, and forgot the danger that had awakened their lusty religious fervor. From a night of storm and prayer they turned to the joy of basking in the warm sun; and as far as their purses and the rules of the ship would admit, celebrated their deliverance in many and devious ways—mostly with a double allowance of Italian wine.

But all was not pleasure for Tito. In the quiet of the night, when the mid-ocean stillness held sway, and the spell of limitless space was upon him, he stood by the rail in a secluded spot, watching the moonbeams dance on the water. At these moments he thought long and seriously of the land he was nearing, and the life before him that would make or mar his future. With all his scoffing disregard for the material side of life, he realized that his prospects were by no means bright. Exuberance of spirit and perfect health were much, but he did not lose sight of what he was to face, of what he was to overcome—alone, almost penniless, his only stock in trade indomitable pluck, and a determination to overcome all obstacles in the mis-

TITO

sion before him, for the fact that he had a purpose in life—to find his father—was fixed and unalterable. What steps he should take to that end, he had never considered. Opportunity would guide him—the result, should he be successful, he had never questioned. Fate had willed to him a mission, terrible in its working out, and horrible in its fixity of purpose,—this he would accomplish.

He was now of an age when his reason should have called a halt; when possible consequences, should his quest for his father be successful, would entail punishment that should turn him from his purpose; but no thought for himself or his safety crossed his mind. The old woman had sown the seed of hate and revenge deep and well. But one idea had taken possession of him; and that, should he succeed, meant to him the end of all.

He had been softly chanting one of the songs of his boyhood; then, for some moments, he watched the moonbeams dance across the pathway of light, while the water on the side of the vessel kept time to the throb of the wheel. The hours went by. Below they slept; and the whispering of the sea was the only sound that disturbed his thoughts. In memory he was wandering again through the woods and the green fields of his own Tuscany. He felt the cool of the water as, sitting on the bank of the Arno, he dangled his bare feet in the stream, and listened to the birds and the bees with a thrill of delight. He fought again his childish battles, and his nerves, even then, tingled with the shame that

TITO

had been heaped upon him. The old woman's rasping tones rang in his ears, and the splash of the water on the prow of the ship seemed an echo of her voice. "Remember thy oath, my Tito. Thou wilt not forget what they call thee,—*Piccolo d'Ignoti?*" Thou wilt not forget? I, too, shall go to America, and see him when his own son has struck him, aye, even to death." And her laugh seemed to come from the depths of the funnels of the ship, and was lost in despairing cadences in the rigging above. "Thou shalt know, my Tito," continued the voice in his ears, "thou shalt know—when the time comes; but not now, not now." The sighing breezes picked up the ghostly refrain and bore it seaward. "He is rich," came the voice again, "as rich as a noble; and he would disown thee, my Tito. Is thy blood of water? Remember thy mother! I hated him, not less than he hated me. And thou hast his accursed fair skin. Could I flay it from thee, boy, would I not do it? But by it he shall know thee when thou shalt stand before him. Ha, ha, ha."

Was it the voice of a siren that seemed to laugh in his ears, or was it a memory that would not die? His blood ran cold, for the sound seemed to come from the sea, and the old woman's uncanny features rose from the shadow cast by the hull of the steamer,—the sunken eyes glowing in their watery sockets. The sight and the sound froze his blood, and the watchman's call roused him from his lethargy of fear.

TITO

Again the voice: "Thou wilt look for him among the rich, my Tito, by the great park, for I have followed him to his very door. Did he think he could hide from me? Ha, ha,—and we were so happy, we two, so happy."

The moon sank slowly and dipped into the sea, and darkness fell quickly over the watery course. With a sigh the boy went below, and the wind whispered softly through the rigging.

CHAPTER XIII.

TEN years had passed, and time had not dealt lightly with Vanburg. His hair was touched with silver, and each succeeding year had added a wrinkle or line to his face, which was prematurely aged. He was not the Vanburg whom we have known—nearly every feature seemed to have undergone a change, and only his eyes, and his fine physique, told that the wreck was not yet complete. Dissipation had attacked his body, but his mind, speaking through his eyes, proclaimed that it had withstood the ravages of the wasted years. His face had assumed a grossness that had changed his features into such that his friends would, with difficulty, have recognized. He wore a full, croppy beard which completely disguised his chin and mouth, and to former acquaintances, should they not hear his voice, he would have passed as a stranger. But apart from an added fulness, his voice was that of Vanburg the clubman, the banker, the aristocrat. When not under the influence of drink, his eyes laughed with the same engaging frankness, and his smile was as a remembrance, a glimmer of his old self, a flashlight through a past that was a living nightmare, for he had lived through years of unspeakable torment.

TITO

After Vanburg's rupture with his father and his resignation from his club, his social world saw him no more. He could have withstood his father's taunts because of his marriage, but his honesty had been questioned, his honor assailed, and he renounced his social world and all past associations. For him there was no intermediate course and he flung himself madly into a whirl of excesses. The nature of the ordinary man, under a charge as unjust and unfounded as Vanburg had faced, would have become embittered, but after the first sting had passed his old time smile returned. But his laugh betrayed the cynicism of one who has lost faith in humankind.

The principal and income from property in his own name lasted but two years; what was left was interest, payable monthly, from a fund beyond his control. When he reached the end of his private fortune he drifted about the country from town to city, until, at last, he returned to New York, where he lived, while his monthly income lasted, in the oblivion of drink. After he had broken off his social and family ties, there had been no gradual descent, for he had plunged to the bottom, to the lowest stratum of dissipation.

Yet through it all, underneath the veneer, the outward semblance of the man, lost to all sense of pride, even of decency, there still remained the sunny disposition, the considerate gentleness, the cool reserve, the lion-heartedness of the Horace Vanburg that had made him, in the eyes of the dead Bettina, a god. Even those with whom he

TITO

daily fraternized,—men whose mental capacity and feelings were as those of beasts—paid him the tribute of respect that unquestioned integrity and undoubted courage commanded. Instinct taught them that he was not of their kind, and his easy familiarity had never entirely broken down the social barriers which they were discerning enough to realize existed.

It was late afternoon and the warmth of an April day was still in the air; the sun's rays leaped over the towering buildings and danced on the water of the East River to the Brooklyn side. Down-town the activity of the day was merging into the quiet of early evening. A dark, turbulent stream of humanity was moving in mighty procession across the bridge, and at the entrance of the East River ferries, human vortexes converged.

Vanburg, in the garb of a longshoreman, had just stepped from one of the wharves and, accompanied by McGlennon, walked up South Street. Entering a saloon, they took seats at one of the tables, and ordered refreshments.

"Mack," said Vanburg, jocularly, "let us make an accounting of our assets. You are, to my best knowledge and belief, broke."

"Right you are," replied McGlennon, "and Saturday's three days off."

"True," said Vanburg. "To me the gods have been most kind, for I boast of two whole American dollars—in silver. These, my friend, represent my measure of ability for lifting boxes onto a truck, and pushing them from the deck of the

TITO

steamer to the wharf. That is a profession which you were good enough to teach me. Gratitude prompts me to tender you one-half my capital—as a loan.”

His companion laughed. “I’ll not refuse; but you—”

“But I? You forget that to-morrow I revel in the princely sum of fifty dollars—a monthly pittance I am not above accepting. That means unlicensed luxury for four whole days, the where-withal to woo forgetfulness and—”

“Twenty-six days of hell,” interrupted his companion.

“No, not quite that—simply days of pushing boxes, when we have work, and the inclination to do it.”

“Kent, you’re a — fool.”

“My dear McGlennon, you have told me that often. Time, I trust, will change your views—and furnish you with a more elegant appellation—human ingenuity could not invent a truer one. On a painfully limited capital you will observe, we are paying ten cents for what can be had at Death House Joe’s for five. When I cannot enjoy the best, experience has taught me that the next best is the worst. Joe’s is superlatively bad—its effect quick and lasting.”

McGlennon laughed. He looked not a day older than when he had shaken Vanburg’s hand upon his first visit to his home in company with Madge Hollander and her brother. He had seen much of Vanburg during the past two years, but

TITO

neither referred to the time when they were both men and gentlemen. They met daily, for there was much in common in their lives; but the older man still had the tie of his daughter's love to bind him to a life of indifferent respectability, while Vanburg had long since abandoned all restraining influence. A further bond of comradeship was the knowledge, which each possessed, that the other was of gentle birth; for both had been educated to a degree that fitted them for any social plane they might have chosen. Only at intervals did either man refer to his past life—Vanburg but seldom, and then in a spirit of jocundity; the other, in serious moments—involuntarily suggesting the thought that regret was yet keenly alive.

They walked slowly, laughing at their experiences of the day, Vanburg, with evident enjoyment, relating the methods by which, because of his inexperience, he had been forced to shoulder a double burden of the hardest work. Entering a resort on the East Side near the Bowery they seated themselves at one of the tables.

In addition to regular customers who were coming and going, there were six or eight loungers standing about the place waiting an invitation to drink, a possibility sufficiently remote to cause them to watch closely those who incautiously displayed any amount of money. Their faces bore but slight resemblance to those of human beings; and their vicious tendencies, controlled only by a wholesome fear of the law, at times turned them into human brutes. Their shifting glances wan-

TITO

dered about the room, and, as Vanburg and his companion entered, a hush followed. Being well known, both men were treated with a respect born of fear.

In the rear of the room one of the patrons, the most villainous looking of the gang, indicating Vanburg with a nod of his head, addressed the loungers near him.

"Yer shud a seen 'm th' other night! 'Micky de Pinch' was getting in his work on a guy wid a load. Micky had his hand in de bloke's pocket an' had connected wid de roll. He wus a drawin' it as slick as yer hand sheds a silk glove, when his 'giblets' over there gits on. Well, what does he do but jest grabs Micky by the nap' of th' neck, and he didn't do a t'ing but slam him against th' per-tition, an' then laid 'de Pinch' flat on 'is back. Say! It jest made de fountain start in me glimmers ter see Micky drop de roll. Now yer know 'de Pinch' can do a good five-minute turn wid 'is fists, an' I t'ought there wus somethin' a comin' ter his Jokers over there. Well, 'Micky' looked 'im over, an' 'pon me word! would yer believe it!—out 'Micky' walks. Nary a word. Two months afore 'de Pinch' was goin' tru an 'Easy Thing' when his giblets takes th' long green from 'Micky' an' gives it back to de find. 'Micky' couldn't open his blinkers fer two days. Oh, he's a peach! He's de real t'ing, he is!"

The two men, meantime, had drunk deeply, and their good nature expanded. They talked of

TITO

their varying experiences, and of times when good fortune had seemed to pass them, without even an indication that it would ever return. McGlennon, contrary to his usual custom, was in a reminiscent mood, and for the first time during their intimacy, which dated back two years, spoke of his past life. Vanburg listened to the man, who, under the influence of drink, referred to times the memory of which lent refinement to his language and the tones of his voice, even elegance of manner and diction, in striking contrast with his present appearance and surroundings. He knew Vanburg only as one whom chance had thrown in his way, and in whom he recognized a kindred spirit; for Vanburg had never enlightened him of the visit to his home.

"It was after my marriage," McGlennon was saying, "that life at home became unbearable. I was the elder of two brothers; the estate was not entailed—I was cut off with the proverbial shilling. I was told that I could contest the will: more, I was assured by the best legal authority in Scotland that I could break it, but I would not consent to the attempt being made. Then I was left alone with my little girl—we came to America. There is nothing left to tell. I joined company with drink, and," he laughed, "I have never deserted the jade—except when I hadn't the price to woo her."

"The jade has used you kindly," said Vanburg, "you appear not a day older than when I first met you."

TITO

"Two years ago this month. You asked me to take a drink. I remember it well, for I needed it."

"And that is what you recall as our first meeting?"

"Yes," answered McGlennon.

Vanburg smiled. "Go back nine years," he said, "you lived in Shadow Alley."

"Yes," the other answered.

"And your daughter was then about eight years old, frail, and pretty—'Bill' you called her."

McGlennon looked surprised. He did not answer, but listened expectantly.

"You remember one day when, having drunk more than was good for you, you returned home to find a lady and two gentlemen in the house?"

"Yes," said McGlennon eagerly, "yes, and one of the gentlemen offered me money."

"And you were foolish enough not to accept it," laughed Vanburg.

"No, I would do the same to-day; but how do you know all this? Who told you?"

Vanburg laughed. "You said when you refused the money that you wanted to meet the man again. Tell me why?"

"Though I don't know how you came by the information, I'll tell you. I had a feeling, somehow, I don't know why, that the young fellow was wild, and I wanted to talk to him, to warn him. You see I knew where drink could land a man. Look about you," he laughed, "here we are! Well, I took a liking to the young fellow—but never saw him again."

TITO

"Would you know him if you should see him?" asked Vanburg.

"Yes, he was of your build, with a smooth face, but a fine looking young man."

Vanburg smiled but did not reply. He knew Madge Hollander still visited McGlennon's home and, if no other reason existed, that one fact was sufficient to decide him to keep his identity a secret. Nine years had elapsed from the time of their first encounter until the two men again met; and Vanburg had remained silent as to his former friends, guarding such information as would disclose his identity.

The evening was well advanced before they left the place and, turning into the Bowery, proceeded uptown. They walked erect, and it was only by an excess of good nature, a loquacious tendency, that their condition would suggest that they were not entirely sober.

They came to Madison Square, and crossing there, turned up Fifth Avenue. Vanburg was seldom drawn to this former familiar locality, but a longing to again visit old-time scenes came over him with a force he could not resist. They had gone on without remark as to their destination, for neither of the men had an intention of going home. Often when Vanburg's funds were low, and he had to choose between a bed or spending his last few cents for a drink, he accepted the latter alternative; for walking the streets through the long night gave him no uneasiness. When the weather made these voluntary vigils irksome, he

TITO

had recourse to the rear rooms of the saloons in the worst section of the city, where, in the company of thugs and thieves of the lowest cast, he spent the hours until morning, wringing human philosophy from lives of squalor and vice. Imperturbable and uncomplaining, he did not fail to grasp the humorous side of such existence; and their stolid indifference to hardship and ill-luck he viewed with something akin to respect. He was always conscious that his lot in life was of his own making—the result of his own acts, and he was satisfied to take what came to him, and smile at the worst. Looked upon with some degree of wonder by those who had the capacity to study him and made the effort, he balked their curiosity, their desire, to know who and what he was, for his smile, his mask-like expression, and a temper which no one, under any circumstances, had ever seen disturbed, baffled even those whose profession it was to read human faces and human weaknesses. His presence was a surety for good order and fair dealing, and an angry flash from his eyes—rarely seen—spoke a language which those who knew him understood and respected. His word went unquestioned, and among those who had reason to fear the law, carried with it a weight that any judge might envy.

Walking leisurely up the avenue, the two men paused before a brilliantly lighted building. The uncontrollable desire to visit scenes of old associations, which in the human race, from king to criminal, is irresistible, had led Vanburg before

TITO

the very door he had often entered—into the very shadow of the building, in the rooms of which he had once been the equal of any man who crossed the threshold.

"There," said Vanburg, indicating the clubhouse with a movement of his head—"there, the man who came to your house once was an honored member. I knew him well—better perhaps, than any living being. It seems but yesterday that he, too, mounted those very steps, as those whom we now see are entering. There he had the same desires, and, at one time, the same ambitions that they now feel, until Fate interfered with his plan of life, and he surrendered, without even an effort, to influences which blotted out every semblance of his birthright."

"You knew him well," said his companion, "then you were of his class—of his life?"

"Yes, I knew him as no other knew him. I know him as no other can or will. You saw him once, but even then he was wandering on the brink of the confines, in whose depths he has found a living hell."

A canvas canopy had been raised from the street curb to the entrance, before which carriages stopped, and the occupants—many of them ladies, alighted and entered the building. From where the men were standing, they could see the faces of those who passed into the brilliantly lighted vestibule.

"Ladies' night," said Vanburg, "a public re-

TITO

ception." Grasping the arm of his companion, he said earnestly:

"You recognize that lady who is just going in with the tall gentleman?"

McGlennon looked eagerly. "Yes," he said, "it is the one who comes to see Bill, my daughter, and once the gentleman you speak of came with her—he who offered me the money. What of him?"

"He is dead," replied Vanburg, "to all intents and purposes, dead. Yet he lives, if you can call it living, for his hope in life is blotted out, and nothing remains but an existence that is a torment. He was married, and his wife—" he caught his breath sharply and his voice was husky as he continued—"enough that he loved her as woman was never loved, and he looked forward to the birth of his child—my God! He dreamed of holding it in his arms, of listening to its voice, as a fulfilment of all that Heaven could give. But Fate, with a two-edged sword, must strike—the child was born dead, and its mother gave her life at its birth. He had his struggle, but the future, for him, was a blank—in a night, hope and ambition withered, and he surrendered to influences which he made no effort to combat. With wife and child gone, nothing remained; and now,—now he is waiting the pleasure of the executioner. He, the yellow devil, toys with him, giving him moments of mad delirium, forgetfulness, that the mental torture may be the more exquisite. Pity is not for him, my friend, for he is not worthy. None know that better than he. If the child had only lived—"

TITO

The words seemed to die on his lips, and silence followed. McGlennon was about to speak.

"Come," interrupted Vanburg, "Death House Joe cures all diseases of the mind, and we have a dollar left. That, my friend, means a night of oblivion and—"

"And to-morrow—"

"To-morrow shall be considered when it comes. It would be an impertinence to anticipate it."

Silently they went back as they had come.

CHAPTER XIV.

TITO'S arrival in New York had been marked by events which, in one so young,—one of a sensitive, imaginative disposition, made an impression not easily forgotten or erased. With little or no knowledge of English, no friends, and only such acquaintances as he had made on ship-board, the prospect before him was not alluring, and to one less self-reliant it would have been disheartening. He was met on all sides by a disdainful lack of interest. No one seemed to know or care who he was, whence he had come, whither he was going; if he had a purpose or a mission in life, that was his own affair, and no one appeared concerned in him, or took cognizance of the fact that he existed. His last penny gone, he looked the world in the face, and demanded of it the living that it owed him; but none heard, or if one did, no one took the trouble to heed. Then he laughed. It was the old mirthful, ringing, youthful laugh with just a shade of the world's bitterness—which is not good to hear from one so young.

But he was learning that the world does not consider those who have nothing with which to woo its favor; he was receiving his first lesson in the great school of experience, whose post-gradu-

TITO

ates have left their whitened bones scattered on the highway of life. Then he grew disdainful. He had no marked fondness for an empty stomach, and it had become a chronic complaint; a bed, all too soon, became an almost forgotten luxury; his clothing was shabby, even ragged, and his toes peeped through his well worn shoes. Watching the boys of his own age selling papers on the street, regarding them, meanwhile, with unwholesome scorn, he wondered if he, too, would be crying the news. They amused him, and, laughing riotously, in broken English he loftily demanded of one his bundle of papers, that he might sell them for him, incidentally assuring the surprised urchin that he would teach him the art of his trade. The young news-vender, partly through jest, mostly in obedience to the haughty demand, surrendered his wares to the arrogant stranger—taking care to keep the boastful Tito within arm's reach, should he have designs on his stock in trade—and the patronizing tones of the newcomer's voice changed to one of confident seductiveness.

"Paper, sir?" His voice rose in a musical cadence, supplemented by a few bars of a popular song, while his eyes laughed with mischievous glee, and his smiling countenance, with a fair beauty that was magnetic in its confiding candor, drew a second look, an answering smile, and the papers went as fast as he could hand them to eager purchasers. The boy condescendingly smiled upon his customers, and they departed well pleased, for

TITO

all the world is irresistibly drawn to those who woo it with a laugh.

The last paper gone, he turned the money over to its owner, scornfully refusing to divide the profits; then, with head high, sauntered off humming the tune with which he had coaxed the pennies from the admiring crowd. Though he scorned to take his share of the profits, he was hungry, and, with a confident stride, entered a restaurant in the Italian settlement near Bleecker Street, on the West Side. There were fifty or more of his own countrymen in the room, and he looked around with an air which said plainly that, if they duly appreciated the good fortune that was theirs, he might consider them worthy of his distinguished company.

"I would eat," he said blandly to the proprietor, "for which I will sing."

"You may eat," replied that prosaic individual, "but you will pay."

He regarded Tito with a doubting eye. He received in return a condescending stare.

"If I sing not well, then will I not eat—aye, even though thou give it me."

"I like your nerve, boy; sing on!"

Tito smiled. He knew, in the glance with which he swept the room, by the faces before him, to whom he was to sing—to a man they were of the Italian peasant class, and he sang a folk-song dear to the hearts of his countrymen—sang it with pathos, expression, and in tones of marvelous purity. When he began, the clatter of tongues and

TITO

of dishes ceased, and he ended in a silence that was a tribute to his art. There followed a demonstration that an artist might envy; but Tito smiled condescendingly and addressed the proprietor, who stood nodding his approval.

"Do I eat?" queried Tito, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes, and well, with wine."

But a dinner was not all, for a handful of coin was placed before him, assuring a week of good living.

He rarely resorted to this method of earning money—only when his last penny was gone, and then more from a feeling of boyish bravado than for the money he invariably received. He had not lost sight of the object of his coming, and many a night, when without food, and compelled to walk the streets or sit in one of the parks, he remembered him whom he sought; the hardships which he himself endured kept alive the flame of hate. The days and the nights bred within him feelings that rankled in his heart, filling him with an overpowering desire to find the father who was the cause of his ill-spent youth; for contact with the world had awakened him to the fact that, so far, his life had been wasted. But the sunny disposition, the light-heartedness, the buoyancy of youth could not be crushed, and through good or bad fortune, foul or fair weather, he refused to view life except through the rose-tinted lens of youth, and he laughed at the ill luck that seemed to pursue him, accepting as his right such good fortune

TITO

as came his way. Tito was endowed with an understanding of men and things that, in one so young, one who had received no education, whose moral and mental training had been left for chance to direct, was remarkable, almost supernatural. He was a keen observer, suspicious of imposition, chary of bestowing confidence, yet heroic in his ideal of right, and with a romantic standard of the sacredness of friendship which was founded on justice that was inborn.

The second month after his arrival, his finer instincts, and his ignorance of the ways of the police, the uncrowned kings of the Metropolis, nearly got him into serious difficulty. Sitting in Washington Park in the early evening, he was sketching some of the human wrecks sitting on the benches. Opposite him was an old man with a face blanched, wrinkled, emaciated, and hair whose whiteness should have been his shield against abuse. Tito had just completed his sketch of the forlorn creature, when an officer, observing that the old man nodded in sleep, first striking him on the feet with his club, grasped him by the collar and sent him reeling along the walk with such force that he fell to the pavement, where he lay stunned and bleeding, unable to rise.

On the instant the boy rushed forward, his eyes blazing, his face scarlet, all the fierceness of his nature roused by the inhuman act. Forgetting that he was not in Italy, where age is respected, where the police are the servants of the people, with clenched hands he was ready to champion the

TITO

cause of the old man. He did not stop to consider his own safety, or the consequence of his interference, and, with eyes that shot gleams of fire, stood before the officer,—the Tito of the valley of the Arno.

"You beast!" he cried, "to misuse the old man. Were I big enough, I would beat you with your own club."

For an instant the officer was so surprised he could not find voice, and he scowled angrily at the daring Tito. He was, however, but momentarily disconcerted, and he swooped down upon the boy. With his hand on Tito's collar, he rewarded him with a shaking such as he had never received—the officer's choice vocabulary being taxed to furnish names sufficiently vituperative to meet the exigency of the case. In short, the warm-hearted Tito was under arrest, and, after a night spent in a cell, was asked by the magistrate what defense he had to offer to the two charges alleged—a breach of the peace and interfering with an officer.

The boy's eyes flashed. His first experience with the arm of the law, or the impressions so far made upon him of its majesty, filled him with unwholesome disdain, so pronounced as to augur ill for his escaping severe punishment. With impassioned fervor, he related in broken English, and the purest of Italian, when the vernacular failed him, the story of the officer's assault upon the old man. His voice rang clear, and his tones carried conviction to the justice on the bench, who, believing the boy, and realizing that his advent in

TITO

America had been of recent date, was so far lenient as to allow him to give his version of the affair in his own way. A New Yorker would not have dared to assume the tone in which Tito stated his case. The spectators listened, well pleased, delighted at the boy's audacity, though fearful that he would receive double punishment for his freedom of speech.

"See!" concluded Tito, drawing from his pocket the sketch which was passed to the judge, "there is the picture of the old man. I drew it as he sat on the bench, as poor as I—and I had not a penny—not even one; as hungry as I, and no food had I that day; yet was I happy, with no complaints—for am I not young? While he—couldst thou, Mr. Judge, see him as I saw him, beaten by that—" He turned fiercely to the complaining officer.

"Enough!" spoke the court, "discharged! Boy, come here."

Tito, with a glance of triumph at the officer, approached.

"You drew this—it is your work?" asked the judge, holding up the sketch.

"Yes, sir," answered Tito, respect in his tone—his idea of American justice had grown rapidly—"I drew it."

"It is well done. You will do more of this. Be a good boy, and remember you are not in Italy."

Tito walked from the room with the stately stride of an ambassador.

He did not underestimate the good fortune of his escape, and though his encounters were many

TITO

—his arrogant independence and quick temper constantly getting him into trouble—the magic of his ready tongue and fair beauty seemed invariably to turn his encounters to his advantage, and the feeling grew that, somehow, by some occult power he was conquering the world.

But in the night stillness, sitting in one of the parks, he brooded over his loneliness, his solitary existence, his present life, which, young as he was, he realized was slipping by, with no ambition other than the consummation of a boyish dream of revenge; and there were times when, had he been thrown in the way of redeeming influence, he would have surrendered body and soul to his natural instincts for good. But at such moments his mind, by a process that was as the ebb and flow of the tide, drifted back to the days of his childhood, and the blood mounted to his cheeks at the remembrance of the words of insult, the anathema of degradation that had been his;—ringing in his ears—a far away echo of the land he loved. The breezes whispered to him, stirring his memory to activity, recalling the fragrant woods, the smiling fields, the turbulent, dancing Arno; and he sighed for the joys that had gone—golden flashes of a past to which time only lent a brighter hue. Then the old woman's features interposed, fierce, vindictive, uncanny in their ghostly outline against the blackness of the night. He shuddered at the memory of her voice, cold, rasping, freighted with malignant hate: her words yet ringing in his ears as if it were but yesterday that he had listened.

TITO

"Thou hast his accursed fair skin, my Tito—but by it shall he know thee. We were so happy,—we two—I and my beloved B—."

"Bettina," murmured the boy softly, "my mother! I shall keep my vow." Taking the picture from his pocket he kissed it reverently.

CHAPTER XV.

TIME had fulfilled the promise of Madge Hollander's girlhood, and her beauty was fuller, more mature than when we last saw her at the home of the McGlennons. A trifle more stately, with an added air of sedateness—this was all that marked the years that had gone, for her smile was as frank, her eyes as fearless as when we first knew her. At times you could see the vivacity of youth merge into an almost matronly seriousness. She had seen much of the world in the past ten years, much that had appealed to emotions other than self-indulgence, much that had awakened in her feelings almost of contempt for the weakness of human nature and the hypocrisy of a world she had long since learned to despise.

She had not met Vanburg for many years, but though she seldom spoke of him, she had not forgotten the friendship of their youth. She knew, as did all his former friends and acquaintances, that he was socially dead; but her faith in him was the faith of her girlhood,—her hope lived on in the belief that he would yet be turned from the life he had chosen.

The club-room was crowded with a representative New York gathering: men of wealth, of note, of national reputation—men whose names were

TITO

enrolled in the financial history of the country; women celebrated on two continents for their beauty, their brilliancy.

Madge and her brother, with others, were standing before a frame in which were the pictures of past members of the club, Vanburg's among the number. His name was mentioned, and Madge looked quickly at the speaker, the blood mounting to her cheeks.

"Yes," he was saying, "Vannie is irredeemably lost, in every social sense, and for all purposes, though I hear that he is living somewhere in town."

"It were better that he were dead," another replied, "when one reaches his level there is nothing left."

It was not the words so much as the tone of voice that made the blood tingle in Madge's veins. Those who were now condemning him were once Vanburg's closest friends. They had enjoyed his confidence, his hospitality; his trust in them had been complete, and, as Madge listened, she felt the sting that ingratitude had the power to arouse, for she contrasted their remarks with what Vanburg would have been prompted to say had his position and that of the speakers been reversed. She was aroused to a feeling of indignation, and, as she replied, her eyes, more than her words, told that she was moved in no small degree.

"You wrong Mr. Vanburg," she said with warmth, "doubly so as he is not here, or in a position to defend himself. How can you judge of

TITO

the causes that led to his downfall? How can you say, with truth, that he will never again take the position in society that he should occupy? I do not know what led to Mr. Vanburg's fall, but I am satisfied that there was some cause, some misfortune, the knowledge of which would prompt us to speak of him with greater kindness. He was one who would not yield to temptation simply for the enjoyment of irrational excesses; but," she turned to the last speaker, "do you think it charitable to speak thus scoffingly of him? My knowledge of the world is not profound, but observation has taught me that men can be most unkind, most unjust. How many men, think you, who maintain the outward semblance of marked respectability, could, should their social mantle, in an unguarded moment, slip from their shoulders, afford to speak slightly of the gentleman under discussion? I may safely say but few; yet men, judging each other, are the most uncharitable of human beings. Let one fall below their social plane, and they crowd each other to trample on him. In my presence, I beg of you do not speak slightly of Mr. Vanburg. I knew him as my brother's friend, as a gentleman. Whatever his walk in life, I believe him such still."

Madge's color had deepened, and the earnestness of her tones left no other alternative than to change the topic under discussion, which was adroitly done by one of the ladies. The gentlemen

TITO

looked crestfallen, and, after some small talk, the group scattered to different parts of the room.

"Madge," whispered her brother, "you're a brick! Poor Vannie needs all the champions who will volunteer for him. Anyway, Davis is a vicious cad, and never had a good word to say for Van. Won't you have an ice, Madgie? You look tired."

"No," she replied, "let us go; it is suffocating here."

An hour later the last of the invited guests had departed, the rooms took on their customary aspect, and only the regular club habitues remained.

Around a card table were seated, almost to a man, the same party that were present one night more than ten years before. The game had been in progress some time, to the accompaniment of wine and much laughter.

"Gad!" said Harriman, "I never saw a man so neatly crushed as Davis was to-night. Said something nasty about Vanburg, and Ned Hollander's sister, in the most artistic manner possible, annihilated him. Davis hasn't recovered from the shock yet, eh! Davis?"

"Did sort of take my breath away," Davis replied. "Said only what everyone knows. He's done for and gone to the dogs."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Harriman, "Davis looked like an eight-dollar-a-week dry goods clerk when he's given his walking ticket. By the way, where is Vanburg now?"

TITO

"Don't know. Someone said that he's in town, but no one seems to know where."

"He draws a monthly allowance, doesn't he, Davis?"

"He has a fixed sum from a bit of property, but that's forwarded through a middleman. No one is aware of his movements. His father knows nothing of him. Vannie's dead to the world."

"All I can say," said Harriman, "is that, with his prospects, he's a fool."

Vanburg and his companion, meantime, were walking leisurely down the Bowery. Neither were in a reminiscent mood, and each respected the other's disinclination to talk. The sight of the clubhouse, and the friends that were once his, had roused in Vanburg memories that rankled in his brain and would not be stilled, bringing home to him the realization of his present position. Something akin to regret started a train of maddening emotions. For a few minutes he was conscious of his awful social isolation, and McGlennon, divining his thoughts, believing that the mystery which surrounded his companion was, somehow, associated with those that they had seen entering the clubhouse, waited for him to speak.

It was not yet midnight, and the customary crowd made the Bowery throb with life. The lights flared and fell upon the faces of all nationalities stamped with varying degrees of viciousness and crime. Homeless youth, tremblingly fearsome, taking the initial step in a downward career; old, hardened offenders who, with furtive glance

TITO

or brazen stare, betrayed the guilty acknowledgment of the craft that they would hide, or flaunted, with derisive leer, that they were post-graduates in the realm of debauchery and crime—these mingled with honest mechanics and housewives, on their way home from one of the cheap places of amusement; young girls whom poverty and hardy self-reliance had taught to pass vice unheeding, and with but slight feeling of interest, repulsion or fear. Human vultures, with lightning eye, singled out those upon whom they could prey; and each, with glance quickened by suspicion, and trained by a knowledge of humankind, recognized those better or worse than himself, regulating to a nicety his social status. And while the world grows in hypocrisy, while debasing tendencies, like a contagious disease, are spread abroad, the gulf between the high and low, the good and the bad, expands into illimitable space.

Vanburg and his companion entered Death House Joe's and drank two or three times in quick succession. There was the customary crowd coming and going, loungers leaning against the wall, and one, "Micky de Pinch," in a darkened corner of the saloon, indicating Vanburg with a nod of the head was saying: "Ef you fellers 'll promise ter stay wid me, say! I'll do 'em for fair! When de other bloke breaks away—well, I *t'ink* we can put 'im ter sleep fer keeps!"

"Micky de Pinch" had a deep and growing grudge against Vanburg, and bided his time until he could pay an old score that had dated from

TITO

Vanburg's interference with his acknowledged profession—thieving.

Though Vanburg was aware of the "Pinch's" intention, he treated the danger—for he was not blind to the fact that it was within the power of the thief to do him bodily harm—with a contemptuous indifference that tended only to further enrage the man, who had openly boasted that he would kill him the first opportunity that presented. When Vanburg had entered the saloon, in the quick glance with which he swept the room, he recognized the "Pinch," but bestowed upon him no further notice than upon the other loungers. He had seated himself at a table opposite McGlenon—his back to the group of men whom "Micky de Pinch" was haranguing. Not indicating by word or look that he was conscious of being the subject of discussion, his ear was alert, and he was satisfied from the tones of their voices, and the few words he could hear, that there was trouble ahead. He smiled faintly, for he knew their kind,—knew that, apart from being taken unawares, he had nothing to fear, and he held them in wholesome contempt.

There was another in the room, sitting on an old bench behind which the "Pinch" was standing, who was a silent though much pleased observer of all that was taking place. His back was against the wall, his knees in the air, serving as a rest for a note-book in which he was sketching the room and its occupants. Seemingly intent upon his work, his willing ear took in what the "Pinch"

TITO

was saying, and he chuckled with evident delight, for, though he did not understand all he heard, he was satisfied that there was trouble brewing, and his smile was one of joyful anticipation. He had transferred the villainous visage of the "Pinch" to his sketch-book, and he regarded his efforts with a critical eye, yet with a glow of pleasure—the likeness would have done credit to a trained hand. His eye again sought the scowling features of his model—the low forehead, wrinkled and scarred, the short, thick neck, set on massive shoulders, the croppy, yellow beard, the bleary eyes that flashed hate, which he made no effort to hide, at the man, who, chatting and laughing with McGlennon, was apparently unconscious that his life, even at that very moment, was in danger. Tito had, with marvelous exactness, caught the expression of set determination on the face of his subject, and with a sigh of satisfaction, turned his attention to Vanburg and his companion. With a deft hand he sketched the two men—McGlennon's face in profile, his good-natured, open countenance wreathed in smiles as he listened to Vanburg's jocular remarks; of Vanburg, sitting with his back to the young artist, nothing was shown but the outlines of his robust form, and his head thrown back while he laughed.

Young Tito, while rounding out a background to the picture with swift but firm touch, was drinking in the scheme of the men who, with a minuteness worthy of nobler deeds, were planning their line of attack upon Vanburg.

TITO

"He's a robber, dat's wot he is!" the "Pinch" was saying. "When I had de long green in me hand—an' I tell you 'twas as slick a job as me fingers ever worked—he lays me out flat, and th' 'dead easy' gets his coin back. What do yer t'ink! Say! Me blinkers wer' closed fer two days! You take care of de big bloke, an' I'll give 'im de 'cold' between de ribs."

For an instant the "Pinch" considerably displayed a knife with a blade six inches long, but it was sufficient time for the industrious Tito to add this bit of realism to his already completed picture—the bar with its mirrors and rows of bottles, the one bar-tender, the sporting pictures on the walls, the men at the table, the glasses in their hands, their heads thrown back, laughing over the good joke that they had money left for only two drinks. The motley gang in the rear of the room the boy had drawn with skill and daring:—"Micky de Pinch," with a devilish scowl on his face and a knife in his hand, in the foreground—his eyes turned on the man who seemed unconscious of his danger. But "Micky de Pinch" had not reckoned on the mirror that faced Vanburg, in which, by the dim light, he had seen enough to make him keenly alive to what was taking place behind him—of all but the boy, who was hidden by the forms of the men who were planning the attack.

Tito viewed the result of his work with a thrill of pride; but he did not like the looks of the knife, and he bestowed a scowl of disapproval upon the man who had displayed it.

TITO

The young nomadic artist had been in New York for one short year, but what experiences had been his! His eyes laughed the same, his smile was the reflection of youthful exuberance, gripping you with a power you could not resist, for it was Nature proclaiming to all the world that the heart within was of gold of the purest coinage. One look at the laughing, mischievous eyes, one sound of the rollicking mirth, that tingled in your ears, setting the heartstrings of joy within you rioting madly, and you put all worldly cares from you and laughed with him.

Still, life had been far from rose-colored since, almost penniless, he had landed in New York. His first efforts were directed toward gaining a livelihood, but these were perfunctory, and only when driven by hunger, or the necessity of procuring a lodging, did he bestir himself to earn sufficient for his needs. In the Italian settlement he was received with open arms, for he could sing, but this did not please him. He looked upon the squalid dinginess of "Little Italy" with something akin to disgust, and after the first few weeks he would have no more of it, preferring to rove about the city, loiter in the parks, doing such work as presented with a completeness and dispatch that brought immediate and generous reward—refusing to work again until his last penny was gone. He was never without his pencil and sketch-book,—they had become to him his companions, and hunger had no terrors, nor had a night spent in the parks the power to depress or to do more than

TITO

inconvenience him. While the daylight lasted, and he could put on paper the scenes representing the ludicrous side of life that, like a moving panorama, were presented to his young, imaginative mind, he was content. His dress was shabby; his face had lost its roundness, and, though his color was fresh, his face bore evidence of lack of the good nourishment to which he had always been accustomed.

As he stood beside Vanburg and laid the sketch on the table, his smile was as frank as of old, his voice a musical echo of the Tito of the fields of Tuscany.

"Is it good?" he asked. "Then shalt thou pay me, but—" he indicated with a grimy finger the "Pinch" with the knife in his hand—"likest thou that? Yet it is as I saw him. What thinkest thou? It is meant for thee."

Vanburg looked at the sketch before him, then into the eyes that laughed into his own. Tito's tone was bantering, but while he spoke, Vanburg had directed a keen, searching glance at the men in the rear of the room, who, even then, were preparing for an immediate attack.

"You did this?" Vanburg asked, incredulously. He was filled with wonder; the portrait of Mc-Glennon seeming to laugh right out from the paper,—his head thrown back, his eyes twinkling with merriment.

"Yes," answered Tito. "Also this," he added, pointing to the knife, "that is for thee. I heard him say as much."

TITO

Vanburg looked again at the boy, then, after glancing quickly at the mirror opposite, spoke to McGlennon in an undertone.

"I have been watching them for some time," McGlennon rejoined, "they mean mischief. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to brush the floor with them. Unless I mistake, that is the thief, Micky, whom I heard boasting that he would 'do you up.' Have a care, Kent, bar-room fights are not to my liking—nor," he added, "to yours."

There was a movement in the rear of the room, a sudden rush, muttered imprecations, and immediately Vanburg and McGlennon were on their feet—not, however, before a knife in the uplifted hands of "Micky de Pinch" was within a few inches of Vanburg's breast.

But there was one on whom they bestowed little attention who, at the sight of the knife, had, with cat-like agility, sprung forward to grasp the arm of the would-be assassin. Tito, recognizing Vanburg's danger, with sturdy courage, interposed between him and the enraged "Micky de Pinch," and the knife, which he was successful in diverting from Vanburg, sank into the fleshy part of his own left arm. For the space of a minute or two Vanburg and McGlennon stood shoulder to shoulder, and delivered such punishment as the gang little expected; but it was of short duration, for since the knife had failed in its purpose, as soon as they could pick themselves from the floor, they scrambled over each other by front and rear doors to escape the sledge-hammer blows delivered by the

TITO

two men, who, with Tito and the smiling bartender, were in possession of the field.

Tito's wound was severe, but only by the pallor of his face and a set expression about his mouth—determination not to give way to the pain occasioned by his injury,—was it manifest that he was hurt.

Vanburg, with a startled look, saw the blood trickling down the hand of the boy, and gently drew Tito to him.

"Poor little fellow, so you received the blow meant for me. Let me remove your jacket."

Examining the cut, he ordered the bartender to procure some clean, white cloth, and, with McGlennon's assistance, bandaged the wound.

"Where do you live?" he asked, gently.

"Here," replied Tito, with a quizzical smile, "while I am here; when I am not, on a bench in the park."

Though he made a brave effort, weakness nearly overcame him, and, unconsciously, he fell back upon his native tongue and spoke in Italian.

"And have you no home?" Vanburg asked in Italian.

"Ha!" replied Tito, evidently pleased, "you speak my language, but you fight like an American! Now, I shall like you. If you would have me truly grateful, teach me the art that you know so well that I may—"

Under the influence of a glass of brandy which the bartender had given him, his strength re-

TITO

turned, the color again stealing slowly to his cheeks.

"Home!" he continued, with his old time laugh, "the round world is my home, and the sky is the roof. You have the picture?" he asked.

"Yes," Vanburg replied, "to-morrow you shall have twice its value, yes, ten times its worth. Boy, your courage nearly cost you your life. Thank Heaven you are safe, I have enough to answer for without that. Come," he said, turning to McGlennon, "we will take the boy to my room; fortunately I have it paid for a week in advance. I can wheedle some doctor into looking at the cut, on a promise to pay to-morrow."

"Pooh!" laughed Tito, "it is nothing—a scratch! Yet it has taught me how it feels, for there is one whom I, too, shall sometime prick with my knife—now I know how it will hurt."

Together they left the saloon and turned east—the son listening with evident delight to the new-found friend, who spoke Italian with the soft, though sonorous, inflection of a Florentine noble—the father whose life the boy had sworn should wipe out his own disgrace.

CHAPTER XVI.

VANBURG and the boy entered a building on a short street which paralleled the Bowery.

The place was old and dilapidated, the stairs rickety, and tenants of the poorest class were hived together, living lives of squalor, penury, even hopeless misery. Here the lowest stratum had been reached, and only death released the dwellers of this heart-sickening abode—for human ambition died at its threshold.

McGlennon left them at the door to seek a physician, assuring Vanburg that one whom he had known many years—a Dr. Remo—would come at his bidding—he had employed him many times to treat his daughter Bill.

Vanburg and Tito mounted the stairs—Vanburg's arm around the boy, who, though he struggled manfully, could not entirely hide a growing weakness.

Entering a room on the second floor in the rear of the house, the sickly flame of an oil lamp disclosed the barren emptiness within. A single chair, a washstand, and a bed, scant of covering, with one pillow, comprised the furnishings of the room—one window relieving its prison-like appearance.

TITO

Vanburg arranged the pillow and gently bade the boy lie down until the arrival of the doctor.

Tito lay at full length on the bed, and his weak smile gave place to a sigh of satisfaction, for had he been compelled to remain on his feet another ten minutes, nature would have set his courage at naught, and weakness forced him to surrender.

They talked of Italy, of the boy's arrival in America, and Tito, with laugh and jest, recounted his trials, his struggles to earn sufficient to meet his needs, his inability to procure work, and the prospect of a future that promised no better results. Gleefully relating his encounter with the officer in the park, he dwelt with feeling upon the kindness of the court in granting his release; but his experiences, whether good or bad, were related with the same light-heartedness, and a disposition to view his misfortunes in the light of a joke. Vanburg listened—in his eyes an expression they seldom reflected. The soft, musical voice of the boy, cheerful, though his wound would have struck terror to the heart of an ordinary man, filled his companion with a sense of pleasurable delight. The tones to which Vanburg listened sent his memory back into a past that he endeavored to forget; but he tried to put such thoughts from him as a trick of the imagination, a fantasy, a dream.

Still the boy talked on. He was drawn to the man who, sitting beside the bed, listened with eager ear to tales of adventure, as Tito recounted his experiences with boyish fervor. Turning his

TITO

head on the pillow, the boy's eyes, with engaging frankness, met the almost sorrowful expression in the face of the man beside him, while the voice melted into a cadence, soft, languorous,—again as a twinge of pain reminded the speaker of his hurt, sinking to a whisper.

What was there in the voice that seemed to thrill the very depths of the man's soul? What magic that could send his mind drifting back to the years that he would forget; what likeness that raised the ghost of the past that he would bury? He could not tell, yet he seemed to have heard the voice before at a time when he was a man, a gentleman. Why should it arouse memories, almost forgotten? What note had been tuned to the tones to which he now listened? He was puzzled, confused, but the memories would not be stilled, and struggled to assert themselves. He looked at the fair beauty of the face on the pillow, the light, wavy hair tossed back from the brow, the eyes that laughed, though the pallor of the face told of physical suffering. Rising, he walked from end to end of the room, nervous, excited, irritated, yet he could not account for the conflict of feelings that possessed him.

As suddenly as he had arisen he again seated himself beside the bed and took the boy's hand in his own.

"Tell me," he said gently, "does it pain you badly?"

"Not much," answered Tito, with a smile, "not more than when I fought in my own *Italia*. They

TITO

were bigger than I and would never fight me singly. Wilt thou teach me to fight as thou didst to-night? Oh, it was grand! How the beasts did fall before thy blows!" He laughed softly, and his admiring eyes turned to Vanburg.

"My poor child, I can teach thee nothing that would be good for thee."

Tito looked at him with wondering eyes. Before he could reply, steps were heard ascending the stairs. Vanburg rose with a sigh and opened the door. McGlennon and Dr. Remo entered.

The doctor, without speaking, approached the bed. Bending over Tito, he unbandaged the wound, and, without loss of time, began dressing it.

"A flesh wound," he said, "not serious, but painful. You must have some knowledge of surgery to have dressed it so well. I could not have done it better."

"The first principles of surgery I learned when at school," Vanburg replied.

When the doctor had entered the room he had not noticed Vanburg, but had at once approached the bed to examine his patient. He now turned quickly, almost with a violent start, and stared at him in astonishment.

For an instant neither spoke. Dr. Remo broke the silence.

"I did not understand," he faltered, "you say you studied surgery?"

"The elementary principles," Vanburg replied.

Having finished dressing the wound, the doctor

TITO

gave directions for its care. Laying his hand on Tito's forehead, he looked at him searchingly for a full half minute.

"Your son?" he asked, turning to Vanburg.

"No," laughed Vanburg, "he is not my son. I am not so fortunate. He is a courageous little devil who turned away a knife meant for my throat. We both met with misfortune by his act. I escaped and he received the thrust."

Tito laughed gleefully. The doctor smiled, his eyes fixed on Vanburg's face, his manner perturbed, his voice betraying that he was laboring under excitement.

"Have you lived long in New York?" he asked.

"Yes, for the past ten years," Vanburg answered.

Again Dr. Remo looked at him—looked with questioning, eager glance, until Vanburg, feeling ill at ease under the eyes which rested upon his features in a prolonged, questioning stare, turned his attention to the boy. The action seemed to recall the doctor's faculties and he prepared to go.

"I shall send you your fee by Mr. McGlennon," said Vanburg. "Allow me to thank you for your kindness in coming."

Again the doctor stared blankly at him. The sound of Vanburg's voice seemed to paralyze him, and for an instant he stood quite confused, in the centre of the room; then recovering himself, he bade them good-night, and, accompanied by McGlennon, descended the stairs to the street. Here

TITO

he plied the Scotchman with questions as to Vanburg's past, but he could learn little.

When they were left alone, Vanburg again seated himself beside the bed.

"You feel better already?" he queried. "Your color has improved."

"Yes," answered Tito. Then, with a laugh, "How comes it that thou knowest my name? I had not told thee."

Vanburg looked perplexed. "No, you have not told me; neither do I know your name."

"Yet thou hast told it to the doctor. 'Little Devil,' it was that thou hast called me. That is why I laughed. Thou hast guessed rightly. They have always called me 'Little Devil.'"

"But you have another name?"

"Yes," came the laughing response. "Tito, that's all—just Tito; but no one calls me by that name, they like 'Little Devil' or 'Little ——,' but I won't tell thee of that—not now."

"And my name is Kent, Horace Kent. My last name is what I am known by, the world has forgotten the other. Tito—that's a pretty name. I shall not call you 'Little Devil'—better 'Little Saint' or 'Little Godfather,' for did you not save my life?"

"Pooh!" protested Tito, "that pig could only have scratched thee, and I received the scratch, wherefore have I not a bed to sleep in? When I again see the villain, I shall thank him for the favor."

Vanburg smiled. "What a brave little chap you

TITO

are, indeed! Well, we are both fortunate, not that I escaped, but that I have you here; for were I alone I should be spending a sleepless night, and now you shall sleep for both of us, and it is time, for morning is most here."

Vanburg lay beside the boy, and almost immediately Tito fell into a sound slumber.

Minutes became hours, and the boy's regular breathing was the only sound; but the man beside him did not sleep, for his brain refused to be quieted, leading him a mad journey through years that he had forgotten, and running through it all was the echo of the boy's voice:—a vibrant note, but the words were stamped on his brain—"Horace, my love, let me hear your voice. Tell me again what I know so well—that you love me."

He made no further effort to woo sleep, lying quite still that he might not disturb the boy, until the sun, hours high, awakened Tito.

Vanburg rose and the boy smiled a good morning. His cheeks were aglow, his eyes clear, and the fever of the past night had left him.

"You are feeling better?" inquired Vanburg.

"Yes, I think I will get up."

"No," said Vanburg, quietly, but with an authoritative tone, "you must not."

Without protest, Tito obeyed; then he wondered at his compliance with Vanburg's order; it was not a request, it was a command.

"Now, little man," said Vanburg, gently, "I must leave you for an hour. There is breakfast for you to consider, and to-day God is very good, for

TITO

it is the fifteenth of the month, otherwise you would go hungry, wherefore Heaven is kind. Had I not the funds coming, I think—I think—” he laughed softly—“I think I should steal that you might eat; though that crime cannot, as yet, be laid at my door. But, as I said, God is good! We shall eat. You will not be lonesome while I am gone?”

“Lonesome? No! While thou art away I shall see again, in memory, the fight, thou and the big fellow standing together and—oh! how thou didst strike out; and the vermin ran—fighting with each other to see who would get out first!”

Tito’s merry laugh rang out clear, musical, hearty, and Vanburg forgot all but the joy of the moment and, with equal zest, joined in the mirth.

With a caution to lie quiet and not disturb his arm, Vanburg went out.

“Heigh-ho!” said Tito with a grimace as the pain darted down his arm into his finger tips, “thus does bad fortune bring good. Have I not a bed, and a breakfast to come, and a good friend? I wonder who he is! He talks like a noble and he fights—*Madonna Mia!* How he can fight! Now I know he is of gentle birth. No clod of the fields, no one but a gentleman could fight as he. Beautiful! His fists went out straight: biff—biff—biff—and they fell before him like a row of ninepins. The swine! and one, that villain of the yellow beard, would knife him! And the big fellow! But he strikes overhand as they swing an axe. If the thieves had only had more courage it would have

TITO

lasted longer; but they ran like women—sheep. Bah!"

He looked about the room, but there was little to interest him—barren walls, torn paper hanging in strips, on which the dust of years remained undisturbed.

"I would much like to look out of that window," quoth Tito, "but he told me not to move, and I must do as he tells me—I, who was never made to obey. He's very nice, and gentle, but he looks very grimy and savage with that beard; but why is he here?"

Vanburg entered, carrying a tray on which was a dainty breakfast.

"Now, little man, you must eat. See!" Vanburg uncovered the tray. "Coffee, rolls, fresh from the baker this morning, an omelet, and—"

"And thou," interrupted Tito, "thou hast not eaten."

"It is too early for me," protested Vanburg.

"Then *I* shall not eat," said Tito, stoutly, "not unless thou wilt eat with me."

"Then we will both eat," laughed Vanburg, well pleased.

They ate the food to the last crumb, chatting and laughing together, Tito relating his boyish escapades, Vanburg listening with new-found pleasure, laughing when the boy laughed or listening with deep, sympathetic interest while Tito related his story of the days without food, the nights without shelter. Then drifting back to his own Italy, he spoke of Florence.

TITO

"Florence," murmured Vanburg, dreamily, "dear Florence, I can see it now, with the soft twilight flooding the tower of the *Palaccio Vecchio*. Ah! boy, you don't know what Florence is to me."

"Thou lovest it?" asked the boy in a subdued tone.

"I love the memories with which it is associated," replied Vanburg, sadly.

A silence followed, broken by Tito. The mention of Florence brought to mind his stolen purse.

In an instant his eyes shot fiery gleams, and, as he related the story of the loss of his purse, Vanburg listened, first with interest, then with astonishment; for it was the Tito of Tuscany who spoke, his cheeks aglow, his voice trembling with passion, his language a stream of invectives hurled at the culprit who had defrauded him.

Vanburg looked at the boy in wonder. "What a little firebrand you are!" he said, with a laugh. "Who would have believed there was a volcano burning within? Now I know why you are called 'Little Devil,' but I like you best as Tito—when you smile, when you laugh, when your voice is soft, full of joy, like a wild bird in the early morning. When I hear that note in your voice I think of dear Florence—ah! boy, you cannot understand, but I have reason to love it, yet greater reason to be sad at the remembrance."

Thus passed the day, Vanburg listening to the boy, as one listens, when, after years of absence, the voice one loves, fills one with joy.

He tended the boy with gentle, even womanly

TITO

tenderness, and McGlennon's coming in the early evening seemed like an intrusion to be resented.

When Vanburg had gone out in the morning for Tito's breakfast, he had given McGlennon the money with which to pay the doctor. The Scotchman, after the customary greeting and inquiry as to Tito's injury, handed the money back to Vanburg.

"You did not see him, then?" Vanburg asked.

"Yes," replied McGlennon, "I saw him. I asked him what his fee was, and he said, 'Nothing.' When I pressed it on him, he got hot; said he would look in at the boy to-night, but he would not take the money."

"What is the meaning of it?" asked Vanburg. "I will not accept service without paying."

"Well," replied McGlennon, "you must talk to him, he'll be here to-night. I'm not to blame."

"True," laughed Vanburg.

"I know," chirped the voice from the bed, "it was because of the fight. I would not take money from one who can fight as thou canst. Now I shall like the good doctor."

"You will not work until the boy is well?" asked McGlennon, as he was about to depart.

"No," answered Vanburg.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT the end of a week Tito, against the advice of the physician, and unheeding Vanburg's earnest entreaties and protestations, pronounced himself well again. With a touch of his erst-time imperiousness, he gave forth his edict. His arm would heal while he sought work, also while he continued a search which, as yet, had been productive of nothing but disappointment. With eyes which spoke a tenderness he did not seek to hide, with his hand in Vanburg's, he thanked him, expressing his gratitude as those of his own country voice feelings that are near to their hearts—in language half romantic and wholly tender.

Vanburg was moved, more deeply moved than outward appearances indicated, and, when satisfied that the boy would not be turned from his purpose, wrung from him a promise that he would come to see him, that, if he needed assistance, he would not hesitate to send for him.

To Vanburg, the past week had been as a week of holy life—seven bright days in the ten years that had been a blot, a mar, a nightmare in the life which had begun with the death of Bettina. It had been to him a week of peace, of contentment, of a yearning desire to keep the boy forever with

TITO

him—the boy who had entered his life by the stroke of a knife in a drunken brawl. He could explain the feelings that drew him to Tito only by the belief that life seemed less lonely, that his presence, his cheerfulness, his laugh seemed to dispel the gloom—a gloom which, when alone, when not under the influence of drink, hung over him like a pall. Yet, when this gleam of light had entered his life, when a hope was held out to him that in the dreary world there might be one who would learn to care for him, again must that hope follow those already dead. Again must he pick up the life which had been interrupted by this boy, and after he had taken one draught of the cup of happiness, when the promise of a new life was held out to him, must he dive into the depths of the hell that, for one brief week, was but a memory that he would stifle. What was this new found joy? What power had this boy that he could awaken memories long since dead? Why should his going stir the very depths of his heart, and kindle again the yearnings, the hopes, the desires which he had put forever from him? He could not tell, no answer came to him, and Tito laughingly consented to his almost passionate appeal that he stay one night more and start in the morning.

On the boy's part, he was loath to go, for the unfaltering care, the tenderness he had received from Vanburg, awoke within him gratitude which grew into affection, and, as the days went by, the unfailing attention he received touched his young heart and started a train of emotions which, to him,

TITO

were altogether new and strange. But, young as he was, he realized that the money which Vanburg was daily spending for his comfort he could ill afford, for he had procured for the boy luxuries with which he never indulged himself. Tito's pride would not bow to Vanburg's request that he prolong his stay; and at the assurance that his income was sufficient for both, the boy laughed and shook his head.

"What will you do?" asked Vanburg. "You cannot work till your arm heals."

"I can sell papers," answered Tito, stoutly. "The American boys screech the news; I sing—a bar or two only, but the customers hear, for they like the song! Then they buy."

"You sing the pennies out of their pockets," said Vanburg, smiling.

"True," the boy answered. "Thou knowest Italy and Italian well; then shouldst thou know this."

He sang a folk-song dear to the heart of every Tuscan—sang softly, with tender pathos,—the last note dying into a tender appeal.

Vanburg listened enraptured.

"Just Heaven!" he muttered under his breath; "the very song she used to sing, her very voice, the same tenderness, expression, beauty. Tell me, boy, where did you learn that song?"

"We of Tuscany all know it," answered Tito.

Vanburg rose and walked the floor. There was silence for some moments, then he asked, "Will you sing it again, Tito?"

TITO

"Yes, of course," laughed the boy.

He sang again, giving rein to his voice and his passion, and when he had finished, Vanburg bent over him and kissed him lightly on the forehead.

Neither spoke, for Vanburg was visibly affected. It was a song Bettina had sung for him times without number, and Tito, divining his feelings, remained silent.

"Tell me, boy, why you will leave me? What is this mission of which I have heard you speak, aye, even in your sleep? What is this search that is before you? Tell me, that is, if it is something you may tell."

Tito did not immediately reply. "Yes," he said, softly, "I may tell thee. I seek my father,—the father whom I never saw, the father whom I do not know, who gave me no name. I search to ask him why they call me '*Piccolo d'Ignoti*'?"

His voice ended in a sob, and his head fell upon his arm. Vanburg strode to his side, and, laying his hand upon the boy's head, asked gently:

"Is it then as bad as that? Poor Tito, the fault is not thine; it is for him to weep, not for thee."

Walking the floor, he spoke again, his voice shaking with emotion.

"Oh, God, if I were that father, what would I not give to call him son,—to swear by the holy book that he was mine by right of Heaven. To clasp him in my arms and feel his lips touch mine in forgiveness. To hear his voice when he would say, 'My father, I forgive you.' But that is not for me. I am one of those leprous things that Fate

TITO

pursues. In all the world is there no single heart-beat which, by right, I can claim as my own. For me the past is dead, the future—what? And now, that Fate should jeer at me, that I may feel with keenness the full despair of a life, childless, alone, I'm told some fiend there is who would disown this boy, while I—my soul might be damned through all eternity if I could only take him in my arms and call him mine."

Overcome by emotion that was almost madness, Vanburg had spoken in English, forgetting, for the time being, that he was not alone. Tito had listened, at first with surprise, then with fear, for Vanburg was filled with overpowering passion sweeping all before it in its intensity—his voice dying into a husky sob. While the boy did not grasp the meaning of the words, the emotions spoke to him a language he understood, and he knew, though he could find no reason for it, that it was his reference to his father that had called forth this outbreak of feeling.

"Hast thou ever had a son?" asked Tito, gently.

"No, no, that was denied me," came the answer.

"But thou wouldst have been a good father, that I believe," said Tito.

"By God's grace, yes, but this I know—that you would be a good son. And you would have loved your father, little man, had he taken the trouble to teach you what love was. Did good exist within him he would have directed your young mind into other channels, and higher ideals would have appealed to you, ideals now hidden by unnatural

TITO

desires—aims, that, in you, are born of external influences foreign to your nature. What you now feel, boy, the hate and the passion that move you, are the barnacles that want of care and want of love have allowed to grow. They will not always remain with you, for your heart is pure. These emotions are but rank growth, and like the hull of a ship after it has been scraped clean, so will your heart be cleansed by love that will purify your being."

Tito's luminous eyes were riveted on the speaker's face, and the sorrowing inflection of the voice moved the boy deeply. They talked far into the night, and for the first time in Tito's young life, he was drinking in words of advice and sympathy that sank into his heart; and seed was sown for a wonderful fulfilment of good that neither had the power to foresee. They lay on the bed—the boy to sleep, Vanburg to stare blankly at the ceiling, listening to the boy's breathing, and anticipate the morrow that would bring with it loneliness, the thought of which made him heartsick.

The long hours of the night wore away; sleep, fitful, dream-ridden sleep came only with the dawn, and with a start, he would wake, always with the consciousness that some misfortune awaited him on the coming day.

The boy slept on, and when the sun stole through the window and the first slanting beams, blades of golden light, shot across the room, they struck upon Vanburg's heart, as would the cry of a sentry proclaiming the hour of execution.

TITO

Quietly he turned on his side, that he might watch the sleeping boy, whose cheeks were aglow with health and youth, sleeping the sleep of one whose mind is yet untouched by the wormwood of the world's bitterness. The sunbeams shifted and fell aslant the face of the sleeper and he awoke—awoke with a laugh, and, springing out of the bed, with a cheery "Good-morning," asked Vanburg if he had slept well.

"Yes," answered Vanburg, with a smile. "As well as usual. As well as usual."

"And I had such a wonderful dream." Tito's eyes rivaled the sunlight dancing through the window. "We—thou and I, were in dear Florence; we were wandering through the galleries; after a time we left the city behind and we could hear the Arno singing its song, far away in the valley where I lived; and we walked through the woods and the fields, and the birds were singing—I wonder if dreams ever come true?"

"Yes, I believe they do, sometimes; anyway, boys' dreams do; but what says my Tito to coffee, hot rolls, and some fruit—the Tito who is going to leave me?"

"Good," laughed Tito, "very good, but thou art far too kind; already thou hast done too much for me—and besides, shall I not see thee again? Yes, and often. I shall not forget my good friend."

Vanburg brightened.

"You will not forget—you promise?"

TITO.

"I never made a promise I did not keep, nor a vow I shall not fulfil."

"I shall hire this room for a month," said Vanburg, "though it is a mean place, so that you may know where to find me; and I shall always be expecting you to come back; and when I hear a laugh on the stair I shall say—that's Tito! He has come back to me again—now for breakfast! You must have patience, little man. To-day I must have the choicest fruit, the hottest rolls, the richest cream for the coffee. This breakfast you must remember."

"That I will, I doubt not," answered Tito, "for to-morrow it will be black bread and a glass of water, or perhaps, the water without the bread. Then shall I think of thy breakfast,—but," he added, gravely, "it will remind me how good thou hast been."

"Good!" echoed Vanburg. "Ha! Good!" and he hurried off for the breakfast.

During the meal Tito chatted and laughed with magpie volubility, but when they had finished, and it was time to go, his voice faltered, and the liquid tenderness of the dead Bettina shone from the eyes that sought Vanburg's. The past week had wrought a change which, with the heedlessness of youth, he had not paused to analyze, and it was when he was preparing to go that he had to call upon his courage and his manliness to choke back the tears.

"Don't forget Tito, the 'Little Devil,'" he said with a laugh that ended with a jar and a half sob.

TITO

"Put this in your pocket," Vanburg handed him a sealed envelope, "and when it comes to the black bread and water, open it."

"It is not money?" said Tito, "for if it is—"

"It is something that will save me hours of misery—of hell. Take it, boy, for my sake."

He was gone, and Vanburg was alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADGE HOLLANDER sat in a room in the Hollander mansion,—a room that was boudoir, study, library, and general work-room, for she was, unlike many of her class, a very busy woman. Here, at an elaborately carved rosewood desk, a relic of a disrupted court of Europe, she sat writing, surrounded by all the requisites of a man or woman of business, for in this room she directed the work of her assistants, women, who, like herself, took a serious view of life and an interest in unobtrusive charity. But of this the world knew little or nothing, for Madge was of the class whose names did not head subscription lists. Here also she received the personal appeals of the very humblest and the poorest people—people who would not have been allowed to enter the ordinary home of the wealthy and exclusive set to which the Hollanders belonged.

But Madge Hollander was not an ordinary woman, even measured by the standard of those who moved in the same sphere of social life, and, as she sat at her desk, paper, ink-stand, blotters, and bundles of formidable documents filed away with womanly precision, there was nothing to remind one of opera nights, and social functions

TITO

that represent the more arduous duties of accepted society leaders.

It was late in the afternoon and she had nearly finished her daily routine. Her brother had returned from the office and sauntered into the room.

"Still at work, Madgie?"

"Hardly at work," she replied, without looking up from the papers she was arranging. "Just finished." Placing the papers on the desk, she turned with a smile to her brother. He was very dear to her—her eyes spoke her feelings and spoke them eloquently.

"You are home early," she said.

"Yes," he replied, "not much to do in the office, and too fine a day to remain indoors. I walked home."

"You walked! Truly you are becoming democratic,—and sensible. All owing to my very good advice and example," she laughed.

"Do I receive no credit for the good sense that comes with age? I am no longer young, and Madge dear, now that you speak of it, neither are you, though I believe young ladies do not care to be reminded of that fact."

"Ned, dear, don't refer to it. I feel but twenty, though," she laughed, "I will confess to a few, a very few years more."

"A few!" he exclaimed. "Tra la! But it would be unkind to go into details. With the work you accomplish, you might be twenty and look forty.

TITO

I will admit, though, considering, I say considering—well, you hold your own very well.”

“Thanks, Ned dear, for your patronizing consideration.”

“Now, Madgie, don’t get sarcastic and I’ll tell you something. I’m going in for philanthropy and all that sort of thing.”

She held up her hand with a deprecating gesture.

“Honor bright,” he affirmed, “I have made a beginning. I have entered the field over which you claim to have personal supervision; though it is not quite in line with your charity work. I have made a find—a discovery. I have a protege who is a wonder, with a voice of an angel, the face of a cherub, the eyes of a young demon, the form of one of the classic gods—and he sings! Madgie, wait, *wait* till you hear him sing! I discovered him. I’ll tell you about it. I frequently run down for lunch to a modest little Italian restaurant on the West Side. It’s a nice place, though a bit Bohemian. When I entered, there was my protege—this young Italian god, with a voice that is a combination of de Reszke, Van Dyke, and Alvarez, but with a freshness and a beauty of tone that any one of those gentlemen, did he ever possess such a voice, parted with long before he saw the shores of America. There he stood, singing to the accompaniment of a harp and a violin, utterly unconscious of all the world, his eyes turned heavenward, and oh, Madge! I wish you could have heard him! But you shall.”

TITO

"Where?" she asked, laughing. "Shall I go to your Bohemian restaurant?"

"No," he answered, "he is coming here."

"Now, Ned, in what new folly are you going to indulge? Why, these nomads—they are little gypsies, and they steal. I believe in charity, Ned dear, but you will observe that my humble efforts are directed to the relief of the indigent poor. Don't bring him here, that's a dear boy; that sort is all well enough for Bohemian resorts, but they earn sufficient money, and—oh, you men do have the most ridiculous ideas of talent, to say nothing of art."

"Well, well, well! If I ever heard you go on like that before! Madge, if you are not getting downright practical! If you had put such common-sense notions into practice in your East Side, ill-advised, charity work, I shouldn't have had to part with half my monthly allowance for the past ten years. Never mind, in my case I'll prove you in error. And his name! Such a wonderful stage name! What do you guess it is?"

"Pietro, of course," she replied with a laugh, "most Italians are called by that name."

"Pietro," he scoffed, "no protege of mine should be called Pietro. It is Tito! Think of that for a name! Think of that name for the stage—grand opera. 'First appearance of the new tenor, Tito.' And I discovered him. But, unless I mistake, one might as well try to harness lightning as to attempt to control my new-found, Italian god. He sings divinely, but he has a vitriolic tongue, and a sur-

TITO

passing vocabulary of gutter slang which he has acquired with an ease and celerity that is nothing short of wonderful, for he has been in this country only a year. He can rival a Bowery-born, but he hurls it at you with a delicious accent and an utter unconsciousness of its offensiveness. Truly, he is a marvel,—but you shall see. He is coming here to sing, that is if he keeps his word, and I believe he will, for I promised that he should be well paid. He condescendingly assured me he was in no need of funds, and he sang only when it pleased him. The little fiend! He patronized me, looked me over critically, demanded if I were a Noble, and quietly informed me that he would know the aristocrats, as he was of them."

"Ned, dear, how you do go on! Take my advice and leave your Bohemian revelers alone; nothing good comes of interesting yourself in their behalf."

"How wise we are!" he rejoined, with some warmth. "Yet this boy has more than a stomach—he has a soul, else his eyes belie him. Wherein he is superior to your East Side charity-grubbers. What a bewildering amount of worldly wisdom you young ladies absorb in an astonishingly short time. There's the bell! That's he of the voice, the eyes, and the god-like mien—don't be shocked, Madgie, at his freedom of speech."

Tito, hat in hand, stood on the threshold, smilingly complacent, bowing with the grace of a court courier.

It was obvious that he had been to some pains to make himself presentable, for his clothing,

TITO

though shabby in the extreme, gave evidence of having been put in as good condition as the many patches would admit. He reveled in a pair of new shoes, for which he had parted with his last penny, and which, unless good fortune still smiled upon him with her customary grace, meant a supperless night and a lodging wherever chance led him. His hair was brushed back in luxuriant waves, and his hands and face, scrupulously clean, glowed with the warmth of his young blood:—his eyes proclaiming that, of all the cares in the world, not one was his. When Tito first appeared at the door, Madge looked at him with surprised admiration, then flashed a look of pleased approval at her brother. The boy's frank, open countenance appealed to her, and with kindly concern and evident pleasure she advanced to meet him.

"Tito," she said, with the intention of putting him at his ease, which was entirely unnecessary, for he was waiting for her to speak, "my brother has told me of you, how well you sing, and of his desire to assist you."

"Sit here," interrupted Ned. "Did you have trouble in finding the house?"

"Oh, no," answered Tito. "I have been by here many times, almost every day. I know it, this street, and well. Here, where the rich live, is there one whom I would find. Ah! but I have searched until I have said,—'it is not here he lives,' and I have looked until my eyes have refused to see. But I shall find him; for it is here with the rich,

TITO

with the aristocrats, that I must seek him, here, where I, too, rightly belong."

Madge and her brother exchanged glances which said plainly that what they had listened to were but boyish vagaries, perhaps the ramblings of one of unbalanced mind. But as they looked at the boy with his fair beauty, his calm, dispassionate expression, when they met his eyes, which looked into their own with self-confident, unflinching frankness, they realized that they were in the presence of an equal. The unconscious bearing of sturdy independence sat well upon him; they respected what he had said, as concerning his own affairs, which courtesy and good breeding forbade them to question.

"Will you sing for my sister, Tito? She will try to accompany you on the piano."

"Could she play for the birds to sing?" he asked. It was the Tito of Tuscany that spoke, and his soft, musical laugh charmed his listeners. "I sing as do the birds of the fields, of the woods,—wild, untaught; but as they sing in dear *Italia*, will I sing, if you wish it."

Madge sat at the piano and ran her fingers lightly over the keys. At the sound the boy stood as one inspired, in his eyes a dreamy expression that smouldered or flashed into flame as she brought forth a succession of harmonious chords. He began the song he sang the night in Florence when he stood before the café, and Madge, with a master touch, and the intuition of the true musician, followed the melody and wove a network of

TITO

harmonies about the simple air. At the end of the verse she dashed into a brilliant interlude, and at its finish, Tito sang the second verse as he had the first, but with an added abandon which thrilled his hearers, ending in a clear, soft, well sustained tone that died almost to a sigh.

"Where did you learn?" Madge asked, as he finished.

"But I have never learned," he answered. "When I return to dear Florence, then will I seek a master who will teach me."

"Will you study here?" Ned asked. "I will see that you have the best instructor in the city."

"Here in New York?" he laughed softly. "It is not for that I came. No. Thou art good, thou art kind; but I sing only when I am hungry—when I would eat. Then I work, when I have that which I can do, and with the money I live—and search for one whom I cannot find. But," his eyes flashed and his tone was determined, "I will find him, else would I not care to live."

They noted his changed expression, the tones of his voice, and they realized that, whatever the object of his search, it had power to stir his emotions, for his eyes told plainly that he was visibly moved.

"But you will let me help you," Ned asked.

He was deeply interested in the boy, and realized that his youth, his ignorance of the ways of Americans, their manners, their customs, placed him at a disadvantage that would be difficult to overcome.

TITO

"In all the world there is no one who can help me," Tito sadly replied, "no one to feel what I feel, no one to understand, even if he cared. Mine is a task the good God has set for me. It is for me alone. If I fail, then is there nothing left to live for; if I succeed—ah! But how can you know? Wilt thou have me sing more? After which will I go."

Again he sang, but the memory of his mission, his vow, was with him, and his tones were as the tones of one who has lost all—his voice now defiant, ringing with passion, again, tender, lingering, sighing the words in almost an excess of pathos.

He did not hear their words of praise; he was eager to go, and a dreamy expression in his eyes told that he had awakened memories that were of his own *Italia*.

"Yes, he would come again sometime, and the gentleman could find him often at the café where they first met, for the proprietor was of his own province in *Italia*, and treated him kindly. No, he sang for the lady—he would not accept money," and penniless and with slight prospect of supper, he departed.

"And this," he mused as he walked toward the park, "is where *I* should live. *I*, Tito, 'Little Devil,' '*Piccolo d'Ignoti*,' who have a father who will not give me another name. Even now I may be passing the very house—his home—where I should live, were I not nameless. I tell Thee, oh, God, Thou hast treated me most unjustly. What

TITO

have I done to Thee? Naught! But if I ask Thee to guide me to this father, Thou dost not answer me. Wherefore, then, should I not revile Thee? Thy promises Thou dost not keep, for I have heard that if one asks of Thee a favor, Thou wilt grant it. I then ask that Thou ledest me to this beast, father. Dost Thou answer me? No. Wherefore there is no God, or else He will not hear for that I do not go to church and put into the poor box the good silver with which I bought me these ill-fitting shoes. I am hungry, aye, even now, and I ask that He give me soup, bread, fruit, yes, and coffee, for I am very hungry, and my stomach cries loudly. Does He give it to me? Again no! Wherefore, if there is a God for all the world, for Tito there is no God, for He will not hear. Then, 'Little Devil,' must thou depend on thy wits."

He had entered the park, and sitting on one of the benches, looked upon the passing crowd, at the moving panorama, for the wealthy class were out in numbers, enjoying their daily promenade. One, old, decrepit, with white hair and ashen face, with eyes that saw not the beauty of the world, and heart that rankled with its bitterness, rolled by in an open carriage, propped up with cushions—unconscious that a fair-haired lad—his grandson,—was sitting on a bench not fifty feet away. The boy looked with pitying eyes at the pallid face,—wondering if the old man could feel the glories of the late afternoon, that sent a thrill of delight to his own heart, driving from him all desire but to live and to drink in the beauty which the good God

TITO

gave to him—the Tito who was penniless, supperless.

But no mysterious whisper told the boy who it was that he had watched until the carriage disappeared in the park; and Vanburg, the grandfather, in moody silence, thought of the son whom he had wronged—the son who would never return.

A policeman, well groomed, well fed and sleek, passed by, and Tito's glance followed him with a disdainful scowl. Tito had a large contempt for these guardians of the public weal, and a flood of invectives rushed to his lips.

"The lazy swine! They are well fed and paid by the government, then they make the poor pay again. Well—I will talk to the gentleman sitting on the next bench. He looks good-natured and it may be he will amuse me. And to-night I shall go to the place of Joe—he who sells bad wine, where that yellow bearded pig struck at my friend with a knife."

He drew from his pocket the envelope which Vanburg had given him. It was sealed. He felt it gingerly, and a quiet laugh caused the occupant of the adjoining bench to regard him with some little curiosity and open admiration.

"Here, in this, is there money. I am rich and, by the *Madonna*, I am also very hungry. My good friend, who gave it to me, said that when I had reached the black bread and water stage I was to open it. Well, I have arrived,—but once before, in Florence, have I been so hungry. There are bank bills within." He held the envelope to the

TITO

light. "He said that I would save him from misery—from hell. I wonder what he meant? At Joe's he drank much whiskey; never have I seen one drink more in so short a time. And this is all mine to spend—as I will. Many good dinners, with wine. Shall I open it? No, that will I not. He had no money the night I went to his house, and he was so kind. I know we shall be good friends, for he was sorry when I came away, aye, of that I am sure; and so was I. No one else cares for the 'Little Devil.' And I have not seen him for many days. To-night shall I go to the place of Joe—Death House Joe's, and should I not find him, I know well where he lives, and if he has no money I shall say,—'See, my good friend, I have much money; you shall take it, as a loan, and pay me back—with interest.'"

Pleased with his own adroitness, he laughed aloud. For the moment he was conscious only of the blue sky, the sighing of the breeze, and he felt as if he were alone in all the great park. The gentleman on the next bench laughed in sympathy; but at that moment Tito's thoughts were of Van-burg, and a subdued expression stole over his features, his heart proclaiming that a new born interest had come into his life—an interest in the man who had befriended him. He longed to see him again; through the days and the nights since they had parted, though he could not explain the emotions that moved him, his mind had constantly reverted to the gentle, affectionate care this lonely man had given him. Tito, unconsciously, was

TITO

wrestling with the problem of the mystery of filial love. Without asking himself the cause which led his mind into these channels, his thoughts to constantly dwell on the deep, though well modulated tones of the man whose touch, gentle as a woman's, even then filled him with a thrill of pleasure, he was aware of a growing desire to see him again. His desire was as that of those who love, a craving that is only satisfied by the touch of lips, of hands, a word of love or an embrace, that fills the heart with a fulness that naught else in this world of passion can do. The ties of consanguinity, the natural instinct of paternal relation spoke to the boy a language universal, unmistakable; he was following impulses which led him to the portals of a yearning love, of a life that he had sworn to take. Fate had devised her own punishment, and was laying the foundation for such agony as the heart of man can know, unalterable in its working out, hopeless in its ultimate result.

But Tito could not long remain under the cloud of sorrowful remembrance which, for a few short moments, seemed to have taken possession of him. He rose, and, shaking himself, as a terrier shakes the water from its wet hide, turned to the gentleman sitting on the adjoining bench. Considering him a fit subject to interrogate, he approached. He would know some things which, at that moment, were not entirely clear to his young mind. This man should tell him. Who better? Tito looked his subject over with discerning eye. Yes, he believed him good-natured, for

TITO

his face was amiable in its expression, and his kindly eyes met those of the boy in a quizzical, though friendly greeting.

"Well, young man, you have been enjoying yourself hugely; and quite alone. It is good to hear you laugh. Surely, you haven't a care in the world."

"No," replied the boy, "I haven't—for the moment. Yet unless Heaven comes to my relief, shall I go to bed supperless. To bed!" His laugh rang out clear, rippling, full of the mirth of a joyous heart. "On a box in a corner," he continued when he found breath to speak, "or a bench in the park, where you dream of downy pillows and warm blankets." Then, with a sudden seriousness,— "But a fat policeman will stir you with his stick, for the government doesn't permit you even to sleep in peace—unless you pay toll."

"Yet you laugh at the prospect?" said the old man. "It does not seem to cause you annoyance."

"Of course I laugh, for it is so droll. Must I cry because the Fates grant me no better bed? Pooh! Not I. To-morrow the sun will be warmer, brighter, and, if Heaven permits, then shall I have a breakfast—when I earn it."

"Boy, you are rich in the philosophy of God's word."

"Ah, no!" answered Tito, stoutly. "I am rich only in what the world has taught me. Why should I not know? I have been kicked around like a ball the boys play with. When I am thrown about, I come down on my feet, and I laugh be-

TITO

cause the world, which should be wise, knows not more than I."

The old man regarded him with a degree of awe in which respect mingled. "Who was this youth with the heart of a child and the wisdom of a sage?" With his eyes on the boy he remained silent for a full half minute.

"What is your name?" he asked, abruptly, though kindly.

"What matters it?" replied the boy. Then, noting the questioner's attitude of kindly concern, he added: "Tito; more I cannot tell thee. Perhaps the Fates will give me a better one."

They talked for some time and, as the boy was about to go, the old man offered him a silver coin. Tito smiled and shook his head.

"No, I thank thee," he said, quietly.

"For your supper," the old man insisted.

"Again, I thank thee," replied Tito, firmly. He stood proudly erect. "Give to some one more in need, to one more worthy. Though I told thee my name was Tito, I have another—'Little Devil.' That thou wilt not like. Then, it is good to do penance and starve some of the little devil out of me! Is it not that which the Church teaches? Then in the morning should I be nearer the God whom I do not know. Perhaps the penance will please Him and He will remember that there is a young Tito who, in the crowding of those who call loudly, He has overlooked. *Madonna Mia*, am I so small that this God they praise so noisily cannot see me?"

TITO

"I do not believe," said the old man, gravely, "that you mean the disrespect which your words imply. Boy, you do not understand. God is all kindness, all goodness."

"Then why does He not give me a supper—also a place to sleep? When I find both will I believe in Him."

"He has offered you both through me."

"That is the charity of man—of the world. Give it to those who need it more than I. It is not for me. I but ask a chance to earn my supper."

His tones rang clear, his proud bearing, as he turned with a respectful "Good-night," moved the old man to lift his hat.

"Good luck go with you, boy, good-night."

Tito strode away and the crowd swept him from sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR the remainder of the day after Tito left him, Vanburg stayed in his room, silent, moody, brooding over the fate that had thrown the boy in his way,—lonely as are those in whom life ceases to be worth an effort, or hope to offer more than that the end come swiftly.

The past week had been to him one of joy, why, he could explain only by the fact that the boy's cheery light-heartedness, his bright face and rollicking mirth made him forget himself and the life that he led, the existence that he hated. With the boy's departure something seemed to go out of his life. In the short time that Tito had been with him, Vanburg had learned to regard him with a feeling akin to love—a love that longed for a return of affection, for someone to whom he could cling, who would look upon him as part of his life, one who would create in him a desire to turn from the dissipation that was a torment to him—dissipation that gave him hours of forgetfulness, of mad delirium, followed by remorse, overpowering, heart-sickening.

He sat by the table, one hand resting upon it, the picture of dejection.

"Why did he come into my life?" he asked with savage emphasis, "to stir within me desires that I

TITO

believed dead, but that were only smothered by the ashes of hopes that were buried, longings that had been stilled, desires as bitter as dead sea fruit. For a day, a week, the blaze sprang to life, to torment, to laugh at me, then,—ah, God! What am I saying? I am mad!" He laughed shrilly. It was unnatural, sickening mirth, for it was sepulchral, inhuman. "But it is not the madness of drink—that compared with it is sanity. Drink—ha! I have not drank for one whole week—one week in fifteen years. And this boy! Had he the power to still the craving, to quench the thirst that, before he came, was insatiable? Yet for one week have I been sober—I, who have wallowed in the very depths of depravity. For one week, sober! To what end? For what purpose? To let my hope rise, like noonday heat, only to again have the night chill strike to my heart, to again realize that I am alone, alone, alone. Aye, as one in a desert is alone, as one adrift in midocean, buffeted by every changing wind until, weary, heart-sick, he ceases to struggle, and is left, a derelict, to be tossed on a sea of despair. Bettina, darling, in the boy's voice, I heard an echo of thine. Could it only have been true—only true! It is too late to work, even if I had it to do, but at Death House Joe's they are always working. There, for an hour, a day, a night, they cure minds of disease, bodies of all earthly ills, and souls—bah! that is not their trade. Each man to his profession—theirs is an earthly, not a heavenly one. Joe, of the House of Death, you have much to answer for,

TITO

much more that you cannot answer. What will you say when you are placed at the bar of the highest court? That you cured diseases of the mind, strangled sorrow for a time, or stifled grief for a night? Will you cry out that all who carried trouble to your door left it without, that yours was a house of joy, of forgetfulness? Aye, that you may with truth, for yours is a trade that caters to the earthly present, not the spiritual future. Where," he said, abruptly, "can McGlennon be? For three days I have not seen him—I will go to him, where, on the wharf, I shall laugh at him, and ask him if the boxes have grown lighter, and to-night, with the money that is left, we will revel in the remembrance of times that were, when we were very much alive. Now,—now we are both dead, dead; only the animal life in us remains."

An hour later he stood upon the wharf where McGlennon had been employed. He was not there, nor had he been there for several days. No one could give him information, and, knowing where the Scotchman lived, he determined to call at his home.

He rapped at the door and it was opened almost immediately by McGlennon's daughter, Bill—her eyes swollen from weeping, her voice faltering as she bade him enter.

Stepping into the room he stood face to face with Madge Hollander.

Though her surprise was great, Vanburg was even more astonished. He knew she recognized him and, with bowed head, and face scarlet with

TITO

mortification, he stood before her, waiting for her to speak.

"Mr. Vanburg, Horace!" she exclaimed, approaching him with outstretched hand, "I must admit my surprise at seeing you; the pleasure I cannot express in words."

With downcast eyes he remained silent, not daring to trust his voice, and, for the instant, his embarrassment, his humiliation, covered him with such confusion that he did not see her extended hand. Then, slowly raising his head, he took her hand in his, and with an effort controlled his voice.

"Madge, I am sorry that you are here, sorry to meet you in my degradation. I feared something was amiss when I could not find McGlennon. Let me go as I came, and forget that you saw me."

Her fingers tightened about his to prevent him from carrying his purpose into effect.

"No," she replied with determination, "that I will not allow. You are right in your conjectures as to Mr. McGlennon; he has met with misfortune, but we will discuss that later. Wilhelmina, dear, will you leave us alone for a little while? I will call you before I go."

McGlennon's daughter entered the adjoining room, and Madge, motioning Vanburg to be seated, placed her chair beside the table near him.

"Tell me," she said, tremulously, "tell me about yourself."

When he spoke his voice was husky, and emotion nearly overcame him. He had always regarded the woman before him with reverence, as a being

TITO

far removed, as one of whom he was unworthy. Of all his former friends, she was the person he most dreaded to see, fearing to meet the frank, fearless eyes that were now fixed upon him, in which kindly concern, even affectionate regard, mingled with the pity that she could not hide.

"There is nothing to tell, nothing you do not already know," he said in a low voice. Then with an attempt at his old-time vivacity, "You see me as I am. Surely tongue could not speak more eloquently."

"You do not know how it pains me to find you as—as you are. You cannot realize how sorry I am." Her voice betrayed her emotion, her eyes told that she was deeply moved, and her expression of kindly concern, of pity, cut him as words had not the power to do.

"Yes," he answered, "I know what you feel—the humiliation that, in me, has not survived the past years; but when pride could not arrest me in my downward course, other emotions were of no avail, and I put them from me."

"Horace, it is not too late. You do not know how your father grieves—how he longs for your return, your forgiveness for the terrible mistake, the injustice that was done you. When I see him he talks of you constantly."

He laughed softly, but with a bitterness unspeakable.

"Madge, as a little girl, you were very dear to me; as a woman, I revere you; but you cannot understand. I know that you have come in con-

TITO

tact with poverty, degradation; you have sought it in your efforts to do good, and you have succeeded where many, many others have failed. But there are levels which you have never reached—God grant that you never will. I have found that level, that inner circle where he who enters may never return, for the passport is the surrender of body and soul, hopes of the present are left behind, future there is none;—nothing but a life that is a blank.”

She was grieved, shocked, the more so, because she realized the mental capacity, the determination of the man to whom she listened; and she knew that no word of hers could turn him from his purpose. In his present state of mind, she deemed it best to discuss other subjects, yet she did not despair, and she again returned to the subject of McGlennon’s trouble.

“Mr. McGlennon has met with misfortune,” she said. “It is better that we speak of it when his daughter is not here. She, poor child, is quite heart-broken. Her father is under arrest. There was some terrible affair where a knife was used. Some poor unfortunate, a man who was with McGlennon at the time it occurred, is dangerously, if not fatally wounded.”

“McGlennon,” exclaimed her listener, “under arrest?” His tone was incredulous. “A knife, did you say? It is impossible! He is too good a man and, notwithstanding his habits, too much of a gentleman to use one. There is some mistake. Tell me the particulars.”

TITO

"I have not seen him, but from what I can gather from his daughter, he was returning home late at night with a companion. They were followed by two men, one of whom was known to McGlennon. He was one 'Pinch,' "—Vanburg smiled—"a notorious fellow, who believed, McGlennon says, that his companion was a friend of his—a Mr. Kent." Again Vanburg smiled. "The two men attacked them in a darkened locality, and McGlennon's companion received wounds which, though meant for another, may prove fatal. Being unconscious the greater part of the time, he can tell little or nothing of the affair. McGlennon was arrested, and poor Wilhelmina's heart is nearly broken."

"Poor Mac," said Vanburg under his breath. "He, too, must suffer for me. Have any efforts been made in his behalf? But I need not ask. I know you have done all that is possible. Poor little Bill! It is she who will suffer most."

"I have engaged counsel," said Madge, quietly, "the best that can be procured. It seems that if this man, 'Pinch,' could be found, it would go far toward clearing the matter up."

"Leave that to me," said Vanburg in a confident tone. "I give you my word to produce him when he is wanted."

"Do you think you can assist the officers in finding him?"

Vanburg smiled at her ingenuousness.

"I could," he answered, "but I will not. I shall find him, I promise you."

"But he is a dangerous character," she insisted.

TITO

"Yes," he agreed, "in a sense, he is; but he is one who strikes from behind; they are seldom to be feared. Rest easy; before to-morrow morning, I shall, unless I very much mistake, hand him over to the authorities. When is the hearing?"

"I understand it was continued until to-morrow. I shall go with Willie. She has not slept since this unfortunate occurrence, and I have been with her constantly."

"My dear Madge, it is not for me to thank you, that shall be for the father; yet let me add my word of praise, of gratitude for your goodness. I should not ask, it would be presumption, but tell me of Ned,—of your friends."

His request again suggested the subject that was uppermost in her mind, and after talking of her brother, her home life, she again returned to the discussion of Vanburg's position and the brilliant prospects he had surrendered.

"Horace," she said sadly, "you will listen to me, and think of the future that might have been yours, that may yet be yours."

"I know what you would say. I can anticipate it almost to a word. Think you that I have not considered it,—have I not thought until madness seemed to beckon to me, until I longed for my mind to give way and become a blank? Can you understand what the years have been to me—the days, the nights? No, no! you cannot, you cannot! But it is too late! The road I follow leads nowhere. Once become entangled in the labyrinth of its byways, there is no turning back.

TITO

Madgie," his voice was tender, entreating, "you are to forget that you met me to-day, forget me as I am, forever to forget—you are to remember me as I was, for now I am as one dead, dead to those whom I called friends—and loved."

She did not reply. Tears glistened in her eyes, and when his voice died to a whisper, her glance fell that he might not see how his words had affected her. She could not deceive herself longer, for the agony that filled her cried aloud that she loved him—loved him as women of her steadfast principles and lofty nature love—unchanging, with a loyalty that even the years of his degradation had not the power to alter. Neither spoke again but, for an instant, her hand lay in his.

"Good bye, Madge," he said, "and God bless you."

Hurriedly he ran down the stairs and through the court to the street.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT night Vanburg started out on his quest of "Micky de Pinch." Knowing his haunts, feeling certain that within a few hours, if his man were in the city, he could locate him, he went about his task leisurely, with no thought for his personal safety and a determination that, before morning, "Micky" would be in the hands of the authorities.

Vanburg was acquainted with the habits of many of the craft of which "Micky" was an adept. He had moved much among them, enjoyed their confidences, knew their haunts, and from long observation, and knowledge of the inner workings of the police, he was satisfied that it would be unsafe to call upon them for assistance in apprehending the "Pinch." He felt assured that if they became aware of the fact that the thief was wanted, by means known only to the officers, the man he sought would be notified, and his escape be a matter of certainty.

He went at once to Death House Joe's, and here,—it was his first visit since his meeting with Tito,—he ordered whiskey, drinking three or four times in quick succession.

Since his interview with Madge he had been depressed as he had not been in years. She had

TITO

brought before him memories that rankled, and he longed to forget in the delirium of drink what his encounter with her called to mind. Though knowing the "Pinch" was far too crafty to venture here if he believed the man he had attacked was not the one he intended to knife, yet he was satisfied he would learn of the "Pinch's" whereabouts, or pick up a clew that would lead to the discovery of his hiding place. His ear was alert and it was not long before his patience was rewarded: the "Pinch's" name was mentioned, and rising, he lighted a cigar at the counter and took a seat nearer the speakers.

"Micky is too fly to be caught," one of the speakers was saying. "D'yer t'ink he's on dis beat an' don' know what's goin' on? 'De Pinch's' ears grow down ter d' groun'. He can hear a whisper in der front office. Oh, he's got er pull, he has! Why, de roundsmen isn't in it wid 'im! Not fer a minit! He wouldn't bodder talkin' to 'em! It's th' captain wid 'em! Well, 'de Pinch' always was a lucky guy. Dey ain't wantin' 'im very bad. He's down ter Kelly's workin' an 'easy t'ing' he picked up."

Having obtained all the information needed, Vanburg went quietly out and, as it was now midnight, hurried on to Kelly's, a resort of the worst character in the city, to make sure that his man would not elude him.

He knew the place well. There were two entrances, one in the rear, leading to an alley-way. Whoever left the place must go by way of the street, and if the "Pinch" was in the saloon, Van-

TITO

burg determined to wait outside until his man appeared.

Looking over the swinging door into the saloon and not seeing the "Pinch," he entered. Standing at the end of the bar by the rear door, he ordered a drink, and his smile of satisfaction was in answer to the voice of the "Pinch," exhorting his "easy thing" to beware of the light-fingered gentry of the city.

"Say," Micky's voice was tearful, "it ain't safe to be found asleep wid de roll yer a luggin', yer ought to leave it at home wid th' missus ter take care of. The guys in the profesh' don't play on th' fair."

Vanburg heard a maudlin response. "I can't act as guardian to that poor fool," he muttered. "My first duty is to McGlennon. Should I go in, the chances are that Micky will not attend the hearing to-morrow, no," he said, glancing at the clock, "to-day—it is most one o'clock; though I could save the drunken lout from being robbed. However, I'll take a look at him, and return him his money, if I can find him, for later, guileless 'Micky' will deliver it to me, though at the moment he may not believe it."

Sauntering by the rear door, he could see the "Pinch" and his victim, "Micky" doing the honors by helping his companion to whiskey from a bottle on the table. Vanburg lighted a cigar, then going out of the saloon, waited on the opposite side of the street, from where he could command a view of the rear entrance. He was certain what would happen;—it was a process old enough to have

TITO

warned even those whose brains were muddled by drink.

It was closing time, there was a scuffle in the room at the rear of the saloon. "Micky's" victim was thrown violently into the alley-way, the lights were extinguished, and the "Pinch" hurriedly leaving the saloon by the front door, walked rapidly east.

Entering a semi-respectable tenement building, the outer door of which was open, the "Pinch" hurriedly mounted the stairs, closely followed by Vanburg. The thief's tastes were, comparatively, luxurious, and he scorned the abodes of the ordinary thief, believing that his standing in the profession called for an outward show in keeping with his unquestioned skill.

What took place after he entered the building, occurred in an incredibly short space of time.

After mounting the stairs, he went through the darkened hall to the rear, opened a door and struck a match, leaving the door ajar while he lighted the gas.

In this "Micky" was unwise, for when he turned to close the door Vanburg stood within the room, the door shut and locked, the key in his pocket. At the first flash of light Vanburg shot a quick glance about the room,—the one article of interest to attract his attention being a revolver on the dresser, almost within arm's reach, but nearer to him than to "Micky," who stood as one stupefied, under the gas jet in the centre of the room.

Instantly Vanburg had possession of the re-

TITO

volver, which he noted, with satisfaction, was loaded in every chamber.

Now "Micky" was adroit, quick-witted, and years of practice had trained him to act with promptness and certainty: qualifications which had placed him in the front rank of his trade. His alert mind, and ever ready wit, grasped the situation instantly, and he realized that, in the dark, with his trusty knife, the chances were as ten to one in his favor. When he had turned and confronted Vanburg, involuntarily he had advanced a step toward him, but when Vanburg grasped the revolver, he stood motionless. He then directed a quick glance at the light, but his visitor divined the thief's intention, and the spring he was about to make to turn off the gas was arrested by the click of the hammer of the weapon in Vanburg's hand.

"Micky," his hand in the air, his eyes blazing, his face livid, was unable, through rage, to control his utterance. Vanburg smiled, and with the revolver covering the man before him, motioned him to step back.

"I know it's unfair to take this advantage of you, 'Micky,'" he said. It was only with an effort he could refrain from laughing at the thief's rage and chagrin. "It's also a low down act to come into a man's private room without being invited. I trust you will waive these little breaches of good breeding. The fact is, I wanted to talk to you, and I knew you were not so kindly disposed toward me as formerly. I don't trust you as I once did, 'Micky.' I must, therefore, ask you to take that

TITO

knife out of your hip pocket and lay it on the table."

"What ter hell d'yer t'ink, I'm a jay?"

"Right on the table, 'Micky,'" said Vanburg in a quiet tone, his eyes fixed on the "Pinch."

The thief's face was convulsed, the muscles twitched, but he had a large respect for the man who smiled with quiet self-confidence, and a wholesome fear of the revolver, which he had reason to believe was in perfect working order. Reluctantly he laid the knife on the table.

"And, 'Micky,'" said Vanburg soothingly, "while you are about it, you might place that roll of bills beside the knife—the money you were thoughtful enough to take from your latest 'find' this morning at Kelly's. I will relieve you of the responsibility of taking charge of it and see that it is returned to its owner."

The "Pinch" glared. "Say—" he began, choking with rage.

"On the table," smiled Vanburg.

With an oath the money was thrown on the table.

"Now," came the quiet command, "I will trouble you to stand as far back as the wall. You are of an impetuous disposition, 'Micky,' and, candidly, you'll bear watching, that is, when there is money in sight. Right over there. That's it. Be docile and we'll get on much better."

The "Pinch," with muttered oaths, did as directed, and Vanburg, after possessing himself of knife and money, returned to his former position,

TITO

taking care that the impulsive "Micky" should always face the muzzle of the revolver.

"Now," Vanburg's tone was conciliatory, "you will please listen to me attentively. We have had one or two little scimmages before. You may remember." "Micky" did remember, his eyes said so almost audibly. "Well, heretofore we have settled our little differences fairly, each having an equal opportunity, each of us relying on his own merits. Isn't that so?"

"Say, what th' devil's all dis about?" "Micky's" eyes were bloodshot, his voice husky. "Yer've got th' stuff I took from de bloke, why don't yer take a sneak? Yer can't pinch any more from me."

"Don't be impatient," was the reply. It was not the words which enraged "Micky," it was the tantalizing smile, and the calm, unruffled air of his questioner that filled the thief with murderous desires. "As I was saying," Vanburg continued, "we have had our little differences, and I have always endeavored to be fair with you, for you fight well, though clumsily, and notwithstanding that you have an exceeding fondness for using the knife,—always, however, from behind. That is a practice of which you should break yourself. It is a vulgar habit, much too low for a gentleman of your prominence."

"What are yer givin' me?" demanded the "Pinch." "Are yer gettin' over the jims, or what?"

"My dear 'Micky,' we are to talk till morning, that is, as you are not in a particularly amiable

TITO

mood, I shall endeavor to do the talking. As my subject, so far, doesn't seem to awaken the interest in you I could desire, I will change to another. Let me see! Ah! I have it! You may remember that some two months ago there was a break up in Westchester County? Am I right as to the time?"

"Micky" glared, but refused to reply.

"I think I am correct," Vanburg continued, his tone one that would wring confidence from a stone. "I fix the date by the attempt to rob a national bank the same night. This, however, failed, but the gang were more successful at the local post-office, their only reward postage stamps. Think of it! Penny stamps! 'Micky,' I wouldn't have believed it of you."

"Say now, look 'ere! I'm sick of this, I am. What's yer lay? Yer've got the 'green' that I pinched at Kelly's, what more do yer want? If yer don't quit and git, I'll make a holler! D'yer hear? a holler, an' I'll have every bloomin' cop in the precinct 'ere in five minutes. I've got a pull that'll get me out all right; now jest notice that an' leave me me tools an' git out."

"What, 'Micky,' make a noise, a 'holler' as you say? With the postage stamps in this room?"

"Micky" winced. "The police would search this very comfortable apartment, and the stamps—that's a ten to twenty years' offence. No, 'Micky,' you'll keep quiet. It's most morning. Later in the day I shall ask you to take a walk with me."

Throughout the night Vanburg talked banteringly or sat silent, never moving his eyes from the

TITO

man who watched for an unguarded moment to spring upon him. But the thief's respect for the courage of his captor guided his judgment, for he regarded Vanburg with fear and a degree of awe. The ever ready revolver lent him a caution which controlled his impulse to escape, and the night wore away. Toward morning, Vanburg, after a long silence, addressed his prisoner.

"Now, 'Micky,' you are going out for a walk, and before we start, a word of advice. I know something of these little affairs up country. Your reputation would not, should you come before a criminal judge, assist you. It is, in fact, odoriferous. The postoffice break is good for a trip up the river. I can furnish all the evidence necessary. If you try to bolt—well, up the river you go. You will now kindly walk two paces in advance of me to the street. I will direct you as we go, and 'Micky,' to quench any desire of making a break, pray allow me to add that at one time I was the champion sprinter in the state of New York, also in some of the eastern states, where larger schools flourish. I have not forgotten the trick. This may sound boastful, my friend, if so, forgive me; I offer it as a morsel of precautionary advice. Now come."

Within twenty minutes "Micky de Pinch" was in the hands of the authorities.

At ten o'clock the hearing began. Madge Hollander, with Wilhelmina, sat beside McGlennon's counsel. Vanburg was to testify, and sat in the rear of the room. When the judge entered, Van-

TITO

burg, with a shudder, recognized an acquaintance of his early life, a member of his club, a gentleman who had been identified with his father in many business transactions. How could he meet this man who might recognize him? This was the hardest ordeal he had been called upon to face, and the blood of humiliation surged to his cheeks.

The hearing was short, almost informal; the victim of the assault, having identified "Micky de Pinch" when he had been brought before him, McGlennon's discharge was a certainty. Vanburg was called to the stand.

He answered the questions in a low voice, testifying as to what he knew of "Micky de Pinch." The judge's eyes were fixed upon him in a prolonged, incredulous stare. Vanburg was looking straight before him, but he felt the glance; he knew that his identity had been discovered.

"What name did you give, Mr. Witness?" Madge Hollander's face became suddenly livid. She was trembling, and leaned forward to catch Vanburg's answer.

"Horace Kent," came the firm reply. Still his eyes were leveled at the rear of the room.

"Kent," repeated the judge. "Your voice is that of a Vanburg. I once knew."

Vanburg turned his head, and his eyes, unflinching, held those that were directed toward him in a steely, searching glance.

"The man of whom you speak," replied Vanburg, "is dead."

The voice was that of a gentleman, quiet, cul-

TITO

tured, and he stood erect, his eyes meeting those of his questioner.

"Yes," came the reply in halting tones, "I—believe—he is—dead."

The case against McGlennon was dismissed, but he was held as a witness and paroled in the custody of his attorney.

Madge and Wilhelmina sought Vanburg to express their gratitude. He had gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON the day of McGlennon's acquittal, Vanburg disappeared. For the three days following the trial, at Madge's request, McGlennon searched for him, visiting the places that he frequented, inquiring of those who knew him, but to no avail. To his friends he was as completely lost as if he were at the bottom of the East River, and, at times, such a possibility suggested itself to McGlennon; but Madge would not entertain the thought. "He is the last man in the world," she declared, "to seek a coward's refuge." Still, the ugly fact remained, and could not be controverted—not the slightest clue of his whereabouts could be found to indicate where he had gone, or when, if ever, he would return.

Madge wished to thank him for what seemed to her the extraordinary capture of "Micky de Pinch"; for the officers had reported before the hearing that the thief was not in the city, or to be found, and that it was more than probable that he had left the country, all of which made Vanburg's feat of producing him the more remarkable. But this was only an excuse, for it was her desire to make one more appeal, once more to beg, to implore him, for the sake of his future, to return to his former life.

TITO

On the fourth day she relaxed her efforts, but she did not despair, and begged McGlennon, should Vanburg return, to communicate with her through his daughter.

But here another surprise was in store for her. McGlennon replied, "Miss Hollander, you know that I appreciate to the fullest extent what you have done for me, and for my daughter, Bill; but don't ask me to do that, which, were I to promise, would make me false to myself and to the friend whom I respect. That, I cannot, I will not do, neither will I deceive you by a promise. Should Kent return"—he knew him by no other name—"and did he ask me not to inform his friends—even you—I would respect his request as I would an oath. Don't think me ungrateful, but I know the man, and it is my belief that he has disappeared to escape those who have his welfare at heart. Who he is, what his past station in life, I know not; but I could not betray him. It would be Judas-like, and I believe you will not ask it of me."

"No," Madge replied, "I respect your feelings, your principles. We shall be all the better friends." So she took up her routine of work, and McGlennon returned to the lifting of boxes.

Bill, gentle, observing, amiable little Bill,—for her bodily growth had not kept pace with the wisdom that had come to her—pondered what she had seen, what she had heard during the past week. Who was the mysterious friend of her father's whom Madge seemed to know, her Madge, the

TITO

beautiful, the fairy god-mother, whom she had watched, had listened to,—whose tell-tale face had disclosed the secret that she believed was locked in her own heart. Bill had discovered it—that Madge loved Vanburg, fondly, passionately. Bill, with jealous insight, had read it in her eyes, in the unguarded tones of her voice, and after Madge had gone she smiled with a sweet joy, because she should share the secret with her benefactress, who would never know.

When Vanburg had left the court-room, it was almost with a feeling of rage that Fate had played him such an unkind trick—that he should have encountered Madge, whom he esteemed above all women, that he should have been recognized by his old acquaintance and friend—the judge of the court. He had but one desire—to get away where he would not again be in danger of meeting those he had known, of enduring the humiliation of being reminded that forever he must be as one dead.

He drank, he drank deeply; and he went on and on to a distant part of the city. In his present state of feeling, he did not wish to see those whom he was satisfied would seek him—not even McGlen-non. To be alone was his one desire; then his thoughts filled him with rage—rage at his own madness, chagrin, shame, and he drank, drank again and again, whiskey always, and always more. At last his nerves became quiet, his brain refused the effort to think, and, though outwardly he appeared sober, a stupor settled over him and the rebellious mind succumbed to the influence of the

TITO

liquor—his thoughts were stilled. The first day of this madness, for madness it was, he forgot to eat; the succeeding two days, the thought of food filled him with disgust. His nights were sleepless, and on the fourth day, when he returned to his room he was verging on nervous and mental collapse.

Lying on the bed he tossed through hours of mental torture, and the day wore into the night. He determined, for that night, to drink no more, and as the hours went by, the reaction began to be manifest. Lack of food, loss of sleep, and the waning effect of the stimulants were doing their work; the nervous system was in a chaotic state, and, with a start, he would sit upright in the bed, at times fancying the room peopled with crowds of the murderous class of which "Micky de Pinch" was the leader. The madness of delirium was with him, and his fevered imagination led him through scenes of terror, carnage, bloodshed—then the mind, by an heroic effort, would again become normal. With the sweat standing in beads on face and brow, he would laugh as they laugh who, when by a trick, an evolution of the mind, the madness they long for eludes them, are hurled back into the realization of hopeless sanity.

During the long night he struggled for the sleep that would not come. The hours went by, hours of fanciful illusions, visions filled with horror—journeys through limitless space, pursued, tortured, escaping only to again take up his never ending flight. His eyes would close for a few seconds, a minute seemed ages, centuries of time,

TITO

then, with a cry of agony, he would beat the air with his clenched fists, to ward off the blows that in fancy were being rained upon him, while spectre hands, long, gaunt, the bony fingers twitching with convulsive eagerness to seize him, yet ever the same distance from him, drew from him a cry of fear, piercing, sickening. Again, trembling with affright, his senses were in command, and, with a moan, sinking on the pillow, he would close his eyes to shut out the awful sight. In a lethargy, he was falling through space, falling, falling since the beginning of time, grasping at air, through clouds, through tempests, while the world rocked and the universe was disrupted, but ever going down, down, until the end of all, of eternity.

A clock striking the hour in a nearby church tower, was the booming of cannon that he heard, and he could see the shells bursting over fields of carnage, bloody, distorted faces, filling him with dread, with fear, sounds of agony, of anguish, appeals of the dying; until a cloud shut in the horror, and his journey through space was resumed.

The morning sun brought the first fitful sleep, for nature was exhausted and the over-tasked nerves found rest.

At nine o'clock he arose, weak, unrefreshed, and after bathing face and hands, sat on the edge of the bed.

"What a night of horror—horrors!" he exclaimed jocularly. "We all reach that stage. It's only a question of time and constitution. Mine

TITO

must be of leather toughness. Ach! But it was terrible! I had a touch of the—em! I don't like to mention it! There on the table is the knife and revolver that 'Micky de Pinch' was considerate enough to deliver over to me. How easy it would be," he mused, as he looked at the weapons. "One touch on the trigger of the revolver, and then—rest, oblivion. They say it's a coward's act—I wonder if it really is! For myself I could soon decide, but there are others to consider—one other, and I wouldn't have it said—no, I will not. Let me see! When did we eat last? One, two, five days ago. What a vulgar necessity eating is—also, at times, drinking. Why can't the scientists invent something like an essence of life, stored vitality, that one injects as one does morphine, and so do away with this eating."

A knock at the door interrupted.

"Come in," cried Vanburg.

Tito entered.

CHAPTER XXII.

TITO paused at the threshold, smiling, his eyes dancing with pleasure, then his rippling laugh rang up the quiet. Vanburg stared at him almost vacantly.

"Is this," he muttered under his breath, "the continuation of my night of horror? Do visions still come to me in broad daylight?"

He rose unsteadily and approached Tito, who, unable to comprehend his action, to understand the look of fear on Vanburg's haggard countenance, waited for him to speak. Vanburg laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"No," he exclaimed, his voice choking with joy, "no, it is Tito, come back to me." His words ended in a half sob and his eyes moistened. "When I believed that you, too, like all the world, had forgotten me, you come to me again. Oh, Tito, boy, why could you not have come before and saved me?—but that is passed." He drew the boy to him, and Tito looked up into the face of the man who held him close. The eyes were blood-shot, the lines about the mouth drawn as if from suffering, the face haggard, colorless. The wondering eyes of the boy questioned the cause before the words came.

TITO

"Thou hast been ill—and alone. Ah! Had I but known—"

"Aye, boy, ill, as the soul is ill, as the mind is diseased. Ill, true, but of my own making. Sick, as those who long to be released, and who cannot be, heartsick, boy—an ailment which you cannot know, which you cannot understand. But enough, you are here and I am well again. See," he said, looking down upon the boy,—his face as that of a death mask—"now am I myself again."

The lips could not force a smile, but in the eyes that were turned to meet those of his visitor, there was a longing, a craving for a look, a word of affection that the quick, intuitive mind of the boy grasped; and an answering flash of feeling lighted up his features.

"Why did I not know that thou wert ill? Would I not have come? Yes, and quickly. Didst thou not care for me as no other ever has?"

"Care for you! Boy, you cannot realize! The days you were with me were the one bright spot in years of darkness. But enough! I can tell by the twinkle in your eyes that you have not had coffee."

Vanburg laughed. It was the old-time mirth and was good to hear. His eyes had become clearer, his face had assumed its normal expression, a faint color had come into his cheeks, and in the boy's presence he seemed a being other than the Vanburg of a few hours before.

He went out and returned with coffee, rolls and fruit; and, under the exhilaration of the coffee,

TITO

they chatted and laughed, Tito, meanwhile, recounting his experiences since he had last seen his companion. At times an expression of abstraction stole into Vanburg's eyes. He was enraptured by the boy's voice, which stirred him as, in years, nothing else had had the power to do. And Tito's eyes, brimming with happiness, lingered on the face of the man, irresistibly drawn to him, the emotions of youth stirring his inner nature into spontaneous outbursts of mirth.

"Tell me," he said, "thou wert ill? Thou! How can it be? Thou who art so strong, who fought with the thieves, aye! like a god!"

Vanburg smiled. "It was the sickness of the mind, the brain. I will not tell you, boy, what occasioned it, for you would think the less of me, nay, you would despise me."

"Despise thee! No. Knowest thou that when I came to thee to-day and saw thee again, it was as though a great joy had come to me? Why should it be so?" he asked in the tone of one who would unravel a great truth. "Thou shalt go thy way and we shall not meet again; I shall go mine—a way that takes me back to dear *Italia*; that will be when, without shame, I can go back and meet those who scoff at me. Then thou wilt forget the 'Little Devil,' and I shall remember thee as one so great, as one who fought as I never can hope to—but I shall also remember thee as one who was good to me."

Vanburg remained silent. Again the boy's

TITO

words brought before him his complete isolation. With an effort he put the thoughts from him.

"Tell me," he said gently, "of your life in *Italia*. Remember that I, too, love the flowers, the song, the sunshine: and had I a desire left, it would be that I could once again see the land that gave me the only happiness I ever knew."

Into Tito's eyes came a dreamy expression. In memory, he was again in the valley of the Arno. Scenes which were stamped upon his impressionable mind revolved before him. Then a cloud overspread his fair face, the passion of his childhood was in control, and the quickening blood, dancing to his cheeks, spoke of shame that still rankled in his heart.

Again he was the Tito of the woods, the fields, his eyes, his voice, his soul in the years that were gone.

"I can tell thee only of the Tito whom no one would know, for that I could not tell them who I was. When they asked me my name, I could only answer Tito. That was all. Then they would smile and walk away. Then would I go to the river and ask the *Madonna* why it was so. But no one would answer but the birds, and after I had cried till night had come, I would go home to the old woman—she with whom I lived—and demand of her who I was, who the father that had brought me into the world to be laughed at, to be called—Ah! if you only knew how it hurt! and the old woman would laugh, laugh as they might laugh in hell. But she would tell me nothing only to wait

TITO

—always to wait. And her face as she laughed—I can see it now! It was terrible! And I would run away into the woods that I might not hear. But little by little she told me all—all but his name, all but the one thing that I would know; and ah! how I longed to learn the name that I might stand before him and ask him what he had to say to me—his son? Then the old woman died, in the night, alone, and had not told me. But he is rich, this father whom I would find. And I shall ask him of the mother whom I have never known, and then—do you know what in my country they say of him who will not avenge a wrong? Do you know they say he is not fit to eat with swine? Think you I would go back and look them in the face could I not say: “Here, on my knife, is his dirty blood?”

As Tito progressed with his story so grew his passion, and his tones, clear and with a determined ring, filled the room, while Vanburg listened, at first with pity, then with surprise which gave place to astonishment. He had not believed the boy possessed of such depth of feeling, and the eyes that flashed gleams of hate told him he was listening to a boy in years with the soul of a man. Vanburg was about to reply but, with an imperious wave of his hand, Tito interrupted.

“Thou wouldst say that I am wrong. How canst thou know who have never suffered the shame, the sorrow? Canst thou tell me why he should not answer me? No, thou canst not, thou canst not.”

TITO

"Would to God that I could, boy, so that you might heed me. What can I say, what can I do to turn you from your awful purpose? Tito, boy, listen to me. It is not of this father of whom I think, but of you. His life, even now, is on the ebb, rushing out, perhaps, with the fast tide. His may be but the wreckage of a life that drifts, no one knows where, no one cares. Your life is in the bud, opening into life, with promise that the gods might envy; but this passion will blight it, and the soul within you will live in torment, it will become shrunken, deformed. All that is good in you will die, the music will leave your voice, the light your eyes, and you will not care for the beauties of your own *Italia*; for on every leaf, on every flower will there be a drop of crimson blood, my Tito."

"Why wilt thou talk to me so?" wailed the boy, agony in his tones, "thou makest me falter—forget; and I would not, I must not. Think of the mother whom I have never seen, think of her wrong. And thou wouldst ask me to forget? *Madonna 'Mia*, no! Ask me not that—I have thought of thee much, aye, each day have I thought of thee. See! Here is the envelope that thou gavest me. I knew what was within—I could tell by the touch, and I said—no, it is not for me. Sometime I shall go to him and he will not have money, and I shall have it for him. Thou wilt not ask me to forget my wrong? Thou, who art so brave. After I had left thee I felt the touch of thy lips on my forehead, and I was glad that someone there was

TITO

who did not remember that I was nameless. And I longed to come to thee again, to touch thy hand, to hear thee speak. But, wert thou the father whom I seek, would I, with this knife, reach thee where the thief failed!"

He took the knife of "Micky de Pinch" from the table, and held it before Vanburg, who, shuddering, turned his head away. It seemed to him, even at that moment, that he could feel the blade as, with the power of hate, the boy's hand drove it home. Taking the knife in his hand he threw it across the room, where it struck against the wall with a steely ring.

"Tito, boy, with this passion your young life will burn out; it will scorch your very soul. Put these feelings from you, for they are madness; they will lead you to no good;—they will result in the death of all the future has to offer. Who could have instilled such thoughts into your young mind? Was it this old woman of whom you speak? You do not realize you are rearing a foundation that will fall and crush you, and the young life that is now so beautiful! Think what it would be with blood upon your hands—the blood of your own father. Think of what I say, boy."

"Think? Have I not thought until my brain aches! Through the days and the nights! Am I not of a people who right their wrongs—with the knife? Can I go back and look them in the face, and then when they say to me, 'Tito, art thou avenged?' must I answer, 'no,' and hang my head with the shame that will be mine? Then shall

TITO

they call me by another name—"Coward!" Aye, "Coward!" That would be worse than the other, for I am no coward. No," he cried, as Vanburg was about to interrupt him, "the Fates have willed it so, it is as they direct. I have my mission, it is as clear to me as the sunlight through the window."

"God grant for your own sake, that you may not succeed. Could I give my worthless life to turn you from your purpose, then would I believe the past years had not been lived in vain. Come, boy, let us talk no more of this. Put it from your mind. You have suffered, aye, sorrow, humiliation, that I believe; but you can rise above these feelings, for you are blameless. But, boy, there is a sorrow, greater, keener, more relentless than any your young life has known, a sorrow that gnaws at the heart, that never slumbers:—sickening, ever and ever with you—remorse. What you now feel is but the echo of a wrong that is not yours; should you succeed, then may you know the torments of the damned. We will speak no more of it—not now. It is yet early, and this is a day I should work that we may live, and there is much to do."

"What is this work that thou must do? May I not also work? See!" Standing, he threw out his arms. "Am I not strong?"

Vanburg laughed.

"Yes, but this work of mine requires skill and long training, and—and, no, little man, it is not such work as you could do. As for me—well, you see, it suits my mental condition."

"But what is this work?" queried Tito.

TITO

Vanburg was being attacked at close quarters. He smiled at the boy's persistence.

"It is concerned with the discharge of a ship's cargo from the hold and the propulsion of the merchandise, by means of a truck, to the wharf. It is a very delicate operation and requires a fineness of judgment in selecting the more accessible and lighter burdens."

"Em! I don't know what it is. I don't think I should like it."

"No," replied Vanburg, "that you would not. You will come to me again, Tito, and soon."

"Yes," he replied.

Within the hour Vanburg was pushing heavy boxes on a truck, for he had no difficulty in procuring work at any time. He went about his labor silently, but he had gained a reputation for prodigious strength, and his willingness and dexterity insured him a day's pay when he cared to seek it.

Throughout the day his mind dwelt on Tito and what the boy had told him of his quest in America. The boy was possessed of will power and determination unusual in one so young, and Vanburg realized that it would be no easy task to turn him from his purpose. He was fully aware of the difficulty which confronted him, and he decided that when he should again see Tito he would question him more fully as to his past life, to gather information upon which to proceed; and the day wore itself away.

At six o'clock, with McGlennon, he was on his

TITO

way to his cheerless room, with the hope that Tito would return. He could not keep the boy from his mind any length of time and, though McGlennon had much to tell, he found Vanburg singularly absent-minded and unresponsive.

At the corner of the street they parted, and the Scotchman, noting his companion's reticence, bade him good-night and proceeded homeward.

Vanburg had reached the entrance of the building where he lodged, and was about to enter, when, hearing his name spoken, he turned quickly, to be confronted by Madge Hollander.

Her eyes sought his, and her smile of pleasure disconcerted him.

"You will forgive me for coming here," she said, "but I must see you, if only for a moment."

"I have no place to which I can ask you to go, where we might talk in privacy." His tone was one of marked courtesy.

"We can walk," she suggested, "I wished to see you so much; to thank you for your help in Mr. McGlennon's trouble. His daughter has sought you every day to express her gratitude; of course her father has already done so."

"He tried to," Vanburg replied, laughing, "but I checked him."

"I writing from Mr. McGlennon, but with great difficulty, the knowledge of where I could find you. Believe me, it was much against his will that he gave me the information; you will not, I know, lay it up against him as a breach of friendship, for he was as loath to tell me as you seem to

TITO

be to keep up our old acquaintance. But I could not help it," her voice was tremulous, "I had an overpowering desire to see you, to speak to you. You can guess the feelings that prompted me. You are not angry?"

"Angry, Madge, dear! No, I know what you would say, I realize what you feel, but the time has long since passed when I could consider what you would suggest. I have, by my own acts, burned the bridges behind me, cutting off all possibility of turning back, destroying all hope of returning to my former position in life. I am as irredeemably lost as if I were, in reality, dead; and it is best so. You could not understand, even were I to attempt useless explanations; suffice it that what made the future something of light, of brightness, passed out of my life, and I am drifting aimlessly without hope, without desire to escape the maelstrom of a wasted existence."

"You cannot realize how it pains me to hear you talk so," she said.

"I have no desire to wound you,—I know you are grieved, shocked."

"Both," she replied. "I hoped to point out a way—"

He smiled at her persistence, her earnestness.

"No, Madge, dear, no. Let us not discuss it further. It is better, Madge, that we do not meet again; nothing good would come of it, and much as I would like to see you, these meetings fill me with unrest,—they stir emotions I would stifle, arousing in me remembrances that are a torture.

TITO

This is not a locality that you should visit, even for a purpose that one of your pure instincts would pursue. I shall remember you, Madge, as a true comrade; and now I will leave you here, where you can take a car uptown. Good bye, and—" his voice shook with emotion—"for God's sake forget that I live."

"Good bye," she replied in a tremulous voice, taking his hand in her own, "I shall remember only that you live, and I shall not despair."

He stood at the street crossing while she boarded an uptown car; then, with a weary sigh, turned away.



"GOOD-BYE," SHE REPLIED IN A TREMULOUS VOICE.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VANBURG sat in his room, moody and abstracted, waiting for Tito to return, but as the hours went by he abandoned hope and determined to go out, for the dreariness of the room was disheartening. His interview with Madge Hollander had not been productive of good, for it stirred memories of his former life, and though he could find no satisfactory reason, his meeting with her had aroused a savage resentment against the world that he blamed for not allowing him to live in peace the life he had chosen.

He paced the floor with rapid strides.

"What right," he muttered, "has the world, of which I ask nothing but to live in my own sodden way, to interfere? Am I necessary to its progress? No! Do I owe it a duty? Once, perhaps I did, but that was when I was of it. Now, I am dead,—to all intents and purposes, dead. The man, the soul within me is no more, nothing remains but the shell, the clay that is fast crumbling, the physical life that is burning out."

He laughed scoffingly.

"Here I am, one in millions of the vast herd, a speck of dirt, a worm: soulless, hopeless, and yet the world, with its vexatious cares, finding time to concern itself with my earthly, my earthly being,

TITO

notes that I am of its figment, and though I have proclaimed myself dead, it insists that I live."

Again the mocking laugh.

"I suppose its lease not having expired, it has a lien upon my human carcass, and it is not content unless it records its own measure of suffering. Will you, rotund Shylock, shake up the bones of him whom you will not permit to remain dead, prod the fire to keep the little life-flame from snuffing out? You cannot resurrect me, for I have been dead too long a time. Use caution, for when you become too persistent, you drive me to visit my friend, Death House Joe. He, the sly, calculating knave, has an antidote for your poison. Take heed, then, how you exact your measure of penance; for the more importunate you become, the more does Joe of the House of Death thrive." He smiled ironically. "Vanburg, you're talking skittles. Thus do they talk who woo an eternal madness,—not the madness of drink,—that other stage, to which the illusions of disordered nerves, is sanity."

He remained silent for some moments,—the rumble of the city, like the sullen growl of a wild beast fretting at its enforced captivity, the only sound.

"Yet," he continued in a gentler tone, "as far as within me lies, I have one regret—Madge. Poor noble-hearted girl, nay," he smiled, "woman, for we are no longer of tender years. What a heart she has! True to the friendship of our youth. She is not of the butterfly crowd, and the years

TITO

have not succeeded in dwarfing her noble character. In her practicability she is worldliness itself and yet, in her purity of thought and deed, unworldly as a child. Dear Madge, I revere you for what you would do for me, for your goodness of heart, for the conventionalities of your social position you hold as naught, even in contempt; but you have stirred within me the demon of unrest. If I knew where to find the boy, I would go to him," he said abruptly. "Tito, yours is a magic power, for you, 'Little Devil,' have, like a vine, wound yourself about my very life. What is it that draws me to the boy? Only the tone of his voice and again I am living the years of hope, of love, of promise. Heigh-ho, that is the way of the weary world. We love, and then,—then it all ends, as all things do that are mortal, all but suffering. That, even before the death of the testator, is bequeathed to the next generation and becomes a perpetual legacy. I believe I'll go out and interview Joe—he of the House of Death—and joy. I am sorry my friend, 'The Pinch,' is detained by the authorities; I rather enjoy his company at times. To-night happens to be one of the times. There is a vast amount of human philosophy in 'Micky,' but Fate directed it into vicious channels; wherefore, 'Micky' is not to blame. But the powers have ruled that 'The Pinch' be detained, thus, by its arbitrary will, balking my desire to further cultivate that very untrustworthy, but withal, fascinating gentleman. Hence, I am thrown upon my own society, which, in my pres-

TITO

ent mood, is not what would be deemed pleasurable, or seeking entertainment at the hands of someone less worthy than the nimble-fingered 'Pinch.' Let it be said, to the credit of that individual, that in his hate he is intense, heroic, even rising, at times, to the sublime. Well, if the law, that insatiable monster, has laid a cruel hand upon him, he suffers not alone, for I am deprived of his very charming society. Now then, Joe, I shall look upon the clan that rally to your slogan,—five-cent whiskey and the forgetfulness of delirium. What if the boy should return? It is late, too late even to hope, yet will I leave the door unlocked and the light burning. And now to woo the yellow jade."

When he entered Joe's, it was plain to be seen that there was a commotion within. The crowd was augmented by one or two new faces, and the excited jumble of voices told plainly that there was strife abroad. Gesticulating wildly, they were all talking at the same time,—one, whom Vanburg recognized as an expert pickpocket, approached him as he entered.

"Say," he bellowed in stentorian tones, "here's his giblets as tru 'Micky de Pinch,' as slick a trick as ever I seed done. He's on de square, he is, an' I'll bank me life on 'im. He's eddicated and can talk one uv de cheap guys, holdin' down a chair on de bench, off his seat. He kin settle dis question as well as any judge."

A roar of approval greeted the speaker's proposition. Vanburg was feared, but his spirit of fair-

TITO

ness had won him the respect of the most hardened offender that knew him; and since his first encounter with "The Pinch," he enjoyed a fast growing popularity. It was a question of thieving ethics that was agitating the motley gathering, and the naive proposition of the spokesman was that Vanburg should sit as judge, and, after hearing the evidence, render a verdict in accordance with their unwritten code.

Vanburg smiled. He was amused at the proposition, at the seriousness with which it was made, at the earnest, set expression on the faces of the crowd, upon which every degree of viciousness was stamped. Ordering the bar-tender to bring the court a drink, they adjourned to the rear room, and, with a formality gleaned from many and costly experiences, the impromptu tribunal convened.

McGlennon had entered, and, having heard the thieves' proposal that Vanburg act as judge, he joined them when they had pushed through into the rear room. As Vanburg took his seat he caught McGlennon's eye, and an amused, quizzical glance passed between the two men. It was a glance both well understood—they would be prepared for any emergency.

"Now, you guys hear me!" it was the originator of the proceedings who spoke. "His giblets 'ere," indicating Vanburg, "is de court, and dis is on de level. Don't interfere wid de court! If yer do—say! dere ain't one uv yer he can't dust de floor wid, so just be as dumb as if yer wer' doin' stunts at two A. M. on a strike-match job. You, Red

TITO

Sullivan, kin do yer own shoutin'; an' yer onto wot dey says of a lawyer as tries 'is own case? Well, he settles. I t'ink I can steer our case t'rough. Is de court ready?"

Vanburg signified that the court was open.

"Then let 'er go! Sully, it's your spiel. No frills now, jest de plain facts! Let 'er go!"

"Yer honor," began Sullivan of the red hair, "it's like dis."

"Are you going to testify?" queried Vanburg, gravely.

"O' course I'm goin' ter tell me side uv de case! What d'yer t'ink?"

"I think," came the calm reply, "that you will address the court with more respect. You are not now in the criminal division of our city court. The witnesses who are to testify will hold up their right hand and be sworn."

The hand of every individual in the room, with the exception of McGlennon, shot into the air.

The court smiled and, with due solemnity, administered the customary oath.

"You may proceed, Mr. Sullivan." The court's tone was of judicial calmness.

The prefix "Mr." disconcerted the intrepid Sullivan. All the parties concerned joined in a spontaneous yell of delight and admiration for the court.

"Say," the voice rose above the roar, "de judge is a peach! Dat's wot he is!"

Vanburg, from his raised seat on the bootblack stand, rapped sharply.

TITO

"If better order is not maintained, the court will be cleared of all but the attorneys and the testifying witness."

Consternation and a momentary silence followed, broken only by the responsive breathing of the plaintiff. The court nodded for him to proceed.

"It's dis way, yer honor," spoke Sullivan, "dis guy 'ere, indicating the cause of the judicial inquiry with a scornful gesture,—me an' dis guy and his pal, 'Bow-leg Sheeny,' were out on a little excursion, dat's de genteel guff fer it, and when we gets back ter town, we have a job lot er silver—de real article, an' no plated fake about it. Well, yer honor, no matter how we got it, it was ours when we struck de town; den when we comes to whack up, de Sheeny squeals—"

"No, I didn't squeal!" The Sheeny pushed forward.

The court rapped for order.

"You there, Mr. Officer, it is time the court had a drink, and Sheeny, I will request you to repress your too evident ardor. You will have an opportunity to testify. Mr. Sullivan, continue."

"It's dis way: Sheeny and his partner got de stuff, an' I watched outside, fer yer see it was no easy crack. Now he claims t'ree quarters of de rake off. *Wot* do yer t'ink of dat fer a steer?"

The Sheeny glared. "Wot de hell! Wasn't I up against a gun? Didn't dey try ter wing me?"

"The next time you interrupt the witness," spoke the court in august tones, "I shall fine you

TITO

the drinks for the crowd. You are already in contempt, sir."

"Dere," volunteered Sullivan, "take a sneak! Go back and hang yerself up on a hook in de hall. Don't interrupt a gentleman when he's argerin' ter de court!"

The court drank and was all attention. Sullivan threw back his shoulders and continued:

"Now, in our profesh', t'ings have got ter be done on de square, see?"

The court manifested that it comprehended.

"Well, dis is me case: I want de court ter order Sheeny ter split up even on de swag. I did me share of de work—"

The Sheeny was on his feet, shaking his fist alternately at the court and in Sullivan's face to give vent to his outraged feeling of justice.

"Half de work!" The Sheeny's voice was tremulous. "Say, do I look like a farmer?"

The court frowned upon the Sheeny. The judge's voice was ominously calm.

"Bar-tender, the drinks for the crowd. Sheeny, the court rules that before you will be allowed to proceed, you must pay the costs."

Muttered imprecations from Sheeny. Then, under his breath: "Dis is worse than a holdup in de first session. Yer can fix it dere wid de cop for any old price. Gee! But dat bloke takes me breat' away!"

Sullivan had finished putting in his evidence, and the Sheeny presented his defence. He re-

TITO

counted the difficulty in conducting so delicate an undertaking, spoke of his experience that covered years of work, jobs to be undertaken only by experts; dwelt with evident emotion on several miscarriages of justice, when, for terms ranging from thirty days to two years, he had been forced into temporary retirement, sojourning on the island, or up the river. With pitying contempt he designated a government that would interfere with a man earning an honest living as unworthy the support of citizens like himself, that had rendered long and honorable service in the conduct of municipal affairs. In eloquent tones he continued:

"Didn't I t'row me five votes in different wards at de last election? An' den de cops ain't satisfied when dey don't touch yer fer all yer make! And now when me and me partner takes all de risk on this little job,—Sully was down de road on de watch,—wot does he say? dat he ought to have an even rake off! Wot de hell! and de watchman trying to pump cold lead into me!" Concluding, he addressed himself to the court: "I knows yer a square guy, an' I wants yer ter do de fair t'ing, see! Dat's all!" He turned to the bar-tender. "Tip off de court wid a ball." Then in an undertone: "Ef dat spiel don't cinch dis case, den de guy's no good!"

Sullivan, with a majestic uplifting of the shoulders, after directing a glance at his adversary, a look of scorn, derision, pity, made a profound bow to the court.

TITO

"Yer honor, now I'll give yer de t'ing straight! Der'll be no frills in mine. Dem's fer de Sheeny and the cheap steerers down ter de first session, looking for an arrest to make der board out of. I'm no oratorier as Hamlet says. I'll give yer de plain story—no fake."

Sullivan dwelt long and earnestly on the facts of the case, maintaining that as he had shared the risk, he should have one-third the profits. His logic was crude, but he maintained his position with energetic ardor, and his peroration was delivered in picturesque language that carried conviction; and if his witnesses had been empaneled as a jury, and not called as experts to testify to the unwritten code of their profession, Sullivan would have won his case on his plea.

But the court, sitting in equity, was to pass on the law and the facts, and before its opinion was to be delivered, the bar-tender was kept busy, for principals and witnesses felt the necessity of fortifying themselves, also of stimulating the judgment of the court.

Vanburg swept the crowd with a calm, judicial eye. Turning to his notes to refresh his memory of the evidence, he began slowly, his voice dispassionate; and his hearers hung upon his well rounded periods with the seasoned judgment obtained by many and varied experiences in courts of justice.

"This case," he said, "involves questions of professional ethics, at once delicate and far-reaching in their results."

TITO

A buzz of admiration from his listeners was an assurance that they appreciated this opening remark.

"I am fully conscious," he continued, "that this cause will be a precedent to be followed, and, fortunately, there is no disagreement as to the facts, so I shall confine myself to the logical deductions of the evidence as conclusions of law which should govern the question at issue."

Vanburg paused to finish a glass of whiskey. It gave opportunity to one of the expert witnesses to remark sotto voce:

"Say! If he ain't de whole t'ing!"

"The gentlemen engaged in this controversy," Vanburg resumed, "occupy enviable positions. They are, to my best knowledge and belief, recognized as experts in the very delicate profession which they so honorably adorn."

The Sheeny so far forgot himself and the respect due the court to exclaim:

"*Now*, yer talkin'! Say! Yer kin just own me shirt!"

The court scowled its disapproval. Sullivan was incensed. "T'row 'im out!" he yelled hoarsely. Sheeny's offer to the court smacked of bribery. The court raised his hand to command silence.

"Gentlemen, you will please observe the rules of the court. I can appreciate the keen interest with which you are imbued." ("Gee! where did he collar dem words? They make me head dizzy.") This from an admiring witness, "But," continued

TITO

the court, "it is the vital principle we wish to reach."

"Now, yer comin' ter it," observed Sullivan. "Is de deal on de square, or isn't it on de square? Dat's wot yer tryin' ter say, isn't it, Judge?"

"Yes," the court agreed, "the only observable difference being the language with which you clothe the thought. In your words there is more zest, more life, less circumlocution."

"More circumlo-hell," cried the Sheeny. His fist shot into the air. "Big words don't stop the bullets, and dat was wot I was up against on dis job. Say, give us the limit, but give it to us quick."

Vanburg smiled. He knew the men before him, knew that whatever his decision, the losing party would be aggrieved, and that a free fight was likely to follow. In his present mood he was not averse to the excitement, neither would he turn his back on a personal encounter were it forced upon him.

They had drunk much. With the stimulus of the whiskey, and the excitement of the trial, the gang was gradually working itself into a state when a word, or a fancied injustice, would precipitate trouble. But though Vanburg appreciated the temper of the crowd, he disregarded the Sheeny's fiery demand, his threatening aspect and, with an aggravating calmness of tone and manner, prepared to resume. McGlennon's eyes twinkled, and it was with difficulty that he restrained himself from laughing outright.

TITO

"As I have before stated," Vanburg said, "the question before us is a delicate one, the more so because there are no precedents to guide the court. This is not a legal question but a moral one, and in arriving at a decision, regard must be had for the sense of justice, and the high standard of honor between gentlemen in the profession of which the principals in this case, as well as the witnesses called by both sides, are honored members. This is not a case for a regular court of justice, for such does not recognize the art which you so ably practice; neither, did you have a standing in a state or federal tribunal, would the court take cognizance of the delicate moral obligations which are not only recognized, but practiced by members of your craft. The province of such courts is to rule upon the law governing the case in hand, and I may safely hazard the opinion that even a court of equity would consider the delicate point raised as too remote, and in its decision would be governed by the fixed rules of law, and not by the delicacies of your unwritten code—your code of honor. The claim of the defendant is, that, inasmuch as he was, upon the night of this—er precarious undertaking, subjected to a fusillade of cold lead, he thereby should be entitled to a portion of the results commensurate with the danger he ran."

"Yer don't get right down ter de groun' in statin' the facts," the Sheeny interrupted, "but yer've cinched de idea."

"Exactly," Vanburg resumed, blandly. He

TITO

shot a glance at McGlennon, who looked intently at the floor to hide a smile.

"But I was about to add that, it is my opinion, when this er—what shall I term it—midnight mission was undertaken, all the parties, contemplating the danger, entered into it upon equal terms, and it is here, gentlemen, where the unwritten law of your honorable profession governs the case. In legal phraseology, each of you took the risk. This risk was indivisible; it could not be apportioned, and it might well be that the plaintiff could have had the burden thrust upon him of stopping the bullets. Had such been the case, he could not have demanded of the defendants an unequal share in the proceeds of their enterprise. I, therefore, must find that, being equal sharers in the risks, the plaintiff should be entitled to one-third the amount realized by the property in controversy."

Maddened by the decision, the Sheeny, with a yell, rallied his supporters about him, and a rush was made on Vanburg, and, as among their class, justice they consider their arch-enemy, they fought for a common cause, blindly, furiously. McGlennon, on the instant, was beside his friend, but in numbers they were outmatched five to one. Tables and chairs were overturned, and those who fell before the terrific blows of the two men, were mixed indiscriminately on the floor, where they, in turn, fought with each other. But a blow from a broken chair felled the court, and McGlennon, wrenching the weapon from the hand of the assail-

TITO

ant, saved Vanburg from further injury. The thieves, having vindicated outraged justice, fled by front and rear doors, leaving McGlennon bending over Vanburg, who lay unconscious on the floor—the blood flowing from an ugly gash in his head.

TITO

"Should Mr. Kent become worse I will send for you. You do not think he will die?"

With eager, questioning gaze, Tito sought his companion's eyes to read there the answer to his fears.

"No," came the confident response, "he is of rugged constitution—as strong as an ox. He got a pretty bad clip, but he'll pull through. There is no fracture, and the doctor believes that some time to-day he will recover consciousness."

After briefly recounting how Vanburg had received his injury, McGlennon went out and Tito was left alone with the sick man.

Tito sat beside the bed, his eyes fixed on Vanburg's face, his breathing barely perceptible, and as the boy looked, fear controlled him. Gently he laid his hand on the white forehead, expecting the chill of death to meet his touch. A moan, faint, almost as a breath, brought new courage to the boy,—his heartbeats quickened at the sound, and a sigh of relief, of joy, quivered on the air.

"He will live, that I know, he is so strong, as the big fellow says, as an ox, and his blood is thick and rich; and the beasts struck him down—even as, in my country, they fell an ox. Ah! but the cowards dare not stand before him and meet his blows! They fight from behind. How I wish I had been there! I, too, would have taken a hand, and I would have singled out the beast who attacked him, and fixed my fingers on his dirty throat—like a bulldog that will never let go."

Again he looked at Vanburg with a tender,

TITO

compassionate glance, and smoothed his hair with touch as light as a mother's kiss on the lips of a sleeping child. The man before him was as a fallen hero, and the strength, the courage that he adored was as naught, his utter helplessness touching the boy with a great pity, stirring his heart in which love had taken root. What if he should die, this new friend, this man whose voice had trembled with emotion when he, Tito, the nameless Tito, had, after his week's stay with him, bade him good bye? Why should this stranger have cared, why have taken an interest in him? Why had his voice grown husky when he learned of the father who had disowned him, the father whom he sought? He could not tell, but it was strange that it should be so, and though he had not the power to divine the reason, stranger still that in his own heart there came a thrill of joy that the man should care. And after the boy's illness, when he had left him, the thought was ever alive that there was one who would be glad should he return, in whose eyes he had seen the tears, whose lips had touched his forehead as a father might have kissed him, had that father cared to call him son. And now the good friend whom he had come to see, of whom he had thought through the days and the nights, who had the power to fill him with joyful anticipation of their meeting, was as one dead. Perhaps he would never speak again, and, at the possibility, the boy choked back a sob, and the ready tears glistened in his eyes.

"I will have him well again," he said aloud, his

TITO

tones low, but earnest. "I will pray to the *Madonna*. But I do not know how to pray. Would she hear me,—me? I will try, very hard, and oh! *Madonna Mia*, thou wilt listen to me, Tito, whom thou lovest not. But it is not for myself I ask, but for him to be well again and strong. Thou wilt hear me, *Madonna*, and give him his life back, that he may speak to Tito again. Thou wilt not be deaf when I call to Thee for that I am Tito, the 'Little Devil?' Ah! Thou wilt be good to him who was so gentle to me, and I will learn the words, the words they say when they ask of Thee a favor, and with them I shall thank Thee, and perhaps Thou wilt be pleased, that I, Tito, have learned to pray, to speak the words of Thy Christ Son."

The bare walls gave back the tones of his voice, earnest, entreating, rising in supplication, falling in a cadence of piteous appeal; and, as if in answer to his petition, the head on the pillow moved, the lips parted as if to speak, and the boy, breathless, listened to the one word, uttered in half a whisper, half a sigh—"Bettina."

Tito's lips formed the word but he could not articulate. He remained silent, motionless, waiting for Vanburg to speak again, but he had relapsed into his former comatose state.

"Bettina," repeated the boy, amazed, wonder in his eyes and voice, "how should he know the name? I had not told him. Ah! Tito, thou dost know but little. Is it not a name common in my

TITO

own country? Does he not know dear *Italia* better than I?"

Sudden alarm, hope, dread expectancy, in momentary flashes, shone from his eyes, as varying emotions swept over him. The quiet of the room filled him with trembling fear. "What if he should die!—and I alone?" he mused. Then bending over the pillow he asked in a voice of pathetic tenderness:

"Can I do naught for thee? Wilt thou not speak to me? It is I, Tito."

Quick came the response in a tone that died upon the lips:

"Bettina, love, it is I, Horace."

Had the boy's voice the power to touch some responsive chord in the brain that was dead to all other sounds? Had the memories of the dead Bettina been the first to respond and awaken the faculties? Could love work a miracle where human science had failed? Perhaps it was so, for again Tito, bending over the pillow, whispered:

"Bettina."

"Yes, love," came the reply with an effort. With a convulsive sigh Vanburg opened his eyes, but the effort was accompanied by a painful twitching of the muscles of the face, and almost immediately he sank into his former stupor.

"Ah! He will live." Joy leaped into Tito's heart, that a few moments before was filled with sorrow, and a fear that was overpowering.

"*Madonna*," he said aloud, "Thou hast answered me when I have prayed, and I thank Thee; but

TITO

Thou must read it in my heart, for my tongue is tied with joy and I cannot find the words. Thou wilt understand, *Madonna Mia*, for the words I have never learned, and now that Thou hast heard, shall I talk to Thee each day, and I shall learn a prayer, the prayers that they say in the Mass."

The color was gradually coming into Vanburg's cheeks. A soft moan escaped him, and again he opened his eyes, but with no sign of returning reason. Tito laid his hand lightly on the forehead of the sick man, then, smoothing the pillow, waited with deep drawn breath some word or sign of consciousness.

The boy spoke to him gently, soothingly, but there came no reply. Again the dead quiet within, the rumbling roar of the city, hope battling with fear, the faint breathing from the bed—a sickening dread again took possession of the silent watcher.

Suddenly Tito was startled by the voice, the tones clear, rational; but in the speaker's eyes, fixed, staring, there was the vacuity of madness.

"The old woman always hated me; she could not hide it. Often have I heard her swear by the saints that she would be avenged; but Bettina, love, I did not love thee less."

Then followed rambling, disjointed sentences; and Vanburg, bit by bit, gave the story of his life in Florence; the joy of his meeting with Bettina after an absence in America, now in the country where they sketched together, again, in imagination, wandering through the Florentine galleries, and he babbled on of art and of love, of hopes that

TITO

were never to be fulfilled, of joy that the hand of Fate had frozen in the bud.

Tito listened as one turned to stone. He dared not think, he could not reason; his mind was in a turmoil; astonishment gave place to fear, fear to sorrow, conjectures flooded his brain, a thousand questions leaped to his lips, but his courage had deserted him, his faculties were benumbed and he had not the power to speak. A stupor took possession of him and at last the words to which he listened struck upon his hearing as meaningless sounds. Gradually the voice ceased from exhaustion, and again the terrible silence, the long drawn respiration of the man, foreshadowing sleep. The boy's quick, gasping breaths told of turmoil, of madness; still he sat by the bed, silent as those are silent who pause to choose between life and death; speechless, as are those who dare not trust their voices, that fear their own passion, and know that inaction is their only safeguard.

The minutes became years, eternities, and his short life was spread before him, seeing it all, living it all, in its pastoral beauty when Nature spoke to him in tones of love that roused within him all his finer instincts, when the fields and the flowers and the birds told to him their story of love and beauty, the gifts of the God he should know, he should love. These had been the companions of his misguided youth,—years that had been barren of human sympathy, of human love. To these he had poured out his young heart, his boyish troubles, his hopes, his ambitions. No human

TITO

hand or heart to guide him; no gentle voice to soothe the bitterness that rankled in his breast, to check the torrents of passion, called forth by the daily taunts, and the shame of being nameless.

The emotions awakened by the memories blended into sorrow, regret for the fruitless years of his youth, brightened only by the voice of Nature speaking to his better instincts. Like a fetid mist an unwholesome vision rose before him, the remorseless visage of the old woman, each wrinkle in her face a line of hate, every tone of her voice crying her vow of vengeance. In the sullen roar rolling through the open window he heard her words: the cry of a lost soul, damned for the vengeance she claimed, trading her hope of Heaven for the fulfilment of the vow she would not renounce.

"Remember thy vow, my Tito, remember thy vow—do not forget, do not forget!"

Her words died into an echo, an echo merging with the rumble and the roar.

With a start and an impetuous gesture he rose quickly and stood gazing at the form on the bed, the faint breathing alone denoting life.

It is not good to hear the young laugh with the bitterness that comes only when faith in mankind dies, when hope is strangled and whatever is left in life is not worth an effort. Such mirth is for those old in years, old in the world's sorrows, disappointments, those who have played the game of life to the finish, have staked all on the turn of a card, and have found their ill-fated destinies still

TITO

in the ascendant, recording in life's notebook their last despairing efforts.

It was such a laugh that, for a moment, caused Vanburg to stir convulsively; and the boy, stopping suddenly, listened to hear him speak, but once more he sank into unconsciousness.

"Bettina, the old woman hated him," Tito's voice was husky. "Why should I think of it! I am mad! Fool, Tito, thou art indeed simple! As if there were not many of the name—many who hated as the old woman did; and when I lay here for a week, was he not as gentle as a mother? and now these devilish thoughts come to me! What if it should be true! Ha! I reason like a babe, and he—he is as poor as I—and I have not enough money to buy him a plate of soup. But he shall have it, aye, that he shall, for will I not go to him who would pay me for singing—the one who is rich, whose sister is of the beauty of a goddess. To him will I say, 'Now will I sing for thee, for thy friends, and if I sing well, thou shalt pay me, that my good friend may have the best,—he who gave to me.' Bettina, Bettina," he whispered the words, bending over Vanburg, "why wilt thou not wake and tell me? *Madonna Mia*, let him hear me and speak."

There was magic in the words, in the voice, and Vanburg's eyes opened wearily, a gleam of intelligence being followed by a faint smile.

"Tito, my good Tito."

His voice was weak, but the words vibrated with tenderness. A great joy sent the tears into the

TITO

eyes of the boy. He could not trust his voice, and the words he would speak died into convulsive sobs, which, with a manly effort, he choked back.

"Tito," came the voice again.

"Ah!" he replied in a trembling whisper, "thou knowest me, thou wilt be well again. The *Madonna* has heard, and thou wilt live. Speak again and then I shall know it is true."

"Tito, dear little Tito, Heaven must have sent thee."

"Aye, Heaven sent me, but it has treated thee badly. Tell me what I may do that will give thee comfort. Ah! I feared—I feared that thou wouldst not speak again; but that has passed."

"How long have I lain here, boy?"

Vanburg's eyes were closed and he spoke with an effort.

"Since last night, and it is now late in the day; the sunlight is fast going. It will soon be night again."

"I heard your voice, it was the voice of one—one who is dead; but I could not understand. Why could I not have slept on—the great sleep, with no awakening? Yes, Tito, Heaven hath been most unkind; for I wake with memory still very much alive. The fight must still go on, until I worry Fate into reason."

"But," replied the boy, "thou art not alone, for am I not here? And when thou wert as one dead, did I not pray to the *Madonna* that thou mightest live? J, who had never prayed before? And the good Mother heard. And when thou didst speak,

TITO

it was of her whom thou call'st Bettina. Thou hast loved her well?"

"Yes, boy, I loved her well." His voice was tender, the words faltering. "And when you, Tito, speak, it is her voice I hear, your eyes are hers. When you sang, it was her tones I heard, the Arno singing with joy, for her voice was of Heaven."

"And she was an artist? That I have heard thee say."

"Yes. And your touch, like hers, is firm and sure, though unskilled."

"And," Tito faltered, "and thou hast spoken of the old woman, one who hated thee."

"Poor creature!" was the reply. "Bettina's aunt, she never forgave me for loving her. But her hatred for me was born of her love for Bettina. I forgave her."

"Did she, too, die?"

"No," replied Vanburg wearily, "as far as I know she yet lives, brooding over her loss, which was mine; but even death could not mollify her."

Tito remained silent, his eyes on Vanburg's face. He longed to question further, but dared not. Again fears and doubts filled him with torment; again the belief forced itself upon him that Vanburg's Bettina was the Bettina whom he had sworn to avenge. He trembled with emotion that threatened to overcome him; his lips formed the words to wring the truth from the man who might be the one he sought, the father who had disowned him.

"What if it should be true?"

TITO

Instantly he was afire with passion, his eyes glowed, the fever of hate seemed to burn in his veins, his throat was parched; but a glance at the man before him, helpless as a child, and his momentary rage melted into pity, shame, at the cowardice of his own thoughts. But he must know, he must learn whether it were true, or were his fears the madness of childish fancy. How should he learn? Could he ask him to speak again of her, the mention of whose name awakened a life sorrow? He waited, eager, breathless, for Vanburg to resume his story, but his breathing, scarcely audible, told that his silence was that of exhaustion.

Vanburg's voice again broke the quiet. Tito bent over him, for his voice was low.

"You have not eaten, boy. You should be hungry. I have money—"

"No," replied Tito, "I could not eat. I was thinking of all thou hast told me, of her whom thou mournest, of Florence—"

"Ah! Dear Florence," Vanburg sighed. "It is strange, but I, too, was thinking, forever thinking. Does it interest thee, boy?"

"Yes. When thou art well again, thou wilt tell me more."

"I shall never be well again. I will tell thee now, boy, if it will please thee, for it is when thou art near me that I think. Thy voice is an echo of the two short years—years that were Heaven. Since then, life has been as nearly a blank as I could make it."

TITO

"But thou wert not always as—as thou art now—poor?"

"No, not always."

The smile that accompanied the words was as a remembrance of the Vanburg of years that had passed.

"And thou wert once rich?"

"I was rich only in what I lost; poorer than thou art, my Tito, in the philosophy of the world's knowledge. But of that I cannot speak. That, too, is dead."

The boy listened while Vanburg told of the two years of his life in Italy, listened with the growing conviction that what he heard was an epitome of his father's and his mother's life during the two years preceding his birth, listened while a hand of ice fastened upon his heart, until at last he paid no heed to the feeble voice that spoke in a whisper.

"It was in the *Palazzo Vecchio* that she finished her last picture, and with a child's enthusiasm begged me to sign my name with hers. We both signed it, 'Horace and Bettina,' the letters twined together. What would I not give for it now; but the old woman took it with the rest."

"Was—was it the portrait of the *Madonna* and the Child?" Tito's voice was unnatural. Vanburg opened his eyes and looked inquiringly at the boy.

"Yes," he replied, his head again sinking on the pillow.

Tito's hand closed upon the painting which he always carried in the pocket of his jacket, the por-

TITO

trait that would tell him what he would know. The names, if they were there, had escaped his notice, and the desire to examine it and set his doubts at rest was almost uncontrollable. But there was a further question that he would ask, before Vanburg sank into the sleep of weariness.

"The old woman and Bettina were all? Was there no child, no son?"

"No," was the reply. "No."

The voice died. The reaction had overtaken Vanburg and sleep shut out all sound. Tito sat as one dazed, unable to move. He could not think, and the minutes went by unheeded. He was conscious that some terrible misfortune engulfed him; conscious that his fingers touched the portrait that would tell him all that he would know, yet with the sensation of one who is to hear his death sentence pronounced, he dare not draw it forth to look for the proof. What would he do if the names were on the portrait as Vanburg had described? "Why, oh, God!" he muttered, "why hast Thou guided me aright? Why didst Thou spare his life when I asked it of Thee, that I, his son, might take it with my own hand? Ah! *Madonna Mia*, and I believed Thee kind! When Thou couldst have let him die, and I should never have known, and now Thou hast given him his life and taken my soul. All will be black. And in the dead night will he come to me, and I shall see him as I see him now, sleeping. There will be the awful red stain left by the knife, and I can never hide from it or shut out the sight. Then I shall

TITO

see her devil's face, hear her voice, but also shall I hear *his* voice, speaking so gently, 'Tito, boy, I am glad you have come back,' and it will ring in my ears, always, always; but in the night it will be more sorrowful, and go where Heaven's vengeance may lead me, I can never shut out the sound—never, never."

Unconsciously he had drawn the picture from his pocket, and his trembling fingers held it with the face turned from him. His own face was drawn, haggard, the blood had left his cheeks—his features those of an old man. Again he sat silent, his eyes fixed upon the table, where, in its scabbard, lay "Micky de Pinch's" knife. The sight of the knife sent the blood leaping through his veins, he caught his breath in short gasps, his fingers closed upon the picture until the frail wood upon which it was mounted, snapped. For that instant he was the Tito of Tuscany, fierce, vindictive, one emotion dominating his being—vengeance.

Slowly he reversed the picture and held it before him. His hands trembled, and in the dim, uncertain light, he could see only what appeared to be a blur in the right hand corner of the canvas. A sigh of relief, a momentary hope, and with a convulsive gasp of joy he rose and, with quick, lithe stride, stood before the window, and held the portrait toward the light.

A cry, a moan of despair rang for an instant on the quiet of the room, and the sleeper moved uneasily. The hope to which he had clung was shat-

TITO

tered, for Tito read the names, the letters interwoven in delicate tracery—"Horace—Bettina."

He stood motionless, all doubt removed, the terror of certainty with him, for it was the truth that he feared, the truth that made his heart seem as ice, the sweat to stand in beads on brow and face, and despair to set his faculties whirling, leaving him powerless to move. At last the vengeance he had sought was to be his; the moment for which he had longed, had dreamed, had prayed for, was here. No need for further search, his mission in life was to be fulfilled, for there, before him, sleeping, his gentle breathing that of a child, lay the father whose life he had sworn should wipe out his own disgrace. Within the hour had he not listened when, with his own lips, this father affirmed that he had no son? There would be no faltering, his was a duty that waited no more propitious time. One stroke of the knife, the thief's, which lay within his reach—the knife he had turned away from the man whose life he would now take, and it would be ended. Again could he return to his own *Italia*, again could he meet those who had looked upon him with disdain, proud in the consciousness that he had, with his own hand, avenged his honor. No more could they taunt him, and he would let the stain of the blood remain on the knife that they might see, that they might believe. The blood! He shuddered. What had his father said? That on every leaf, on every flower, would be a drop of crimson blood—the blood of his own father to cry out to him; and one word would ring

TITO

forever in his ears—remorse, remorse, remorse. And day and night would there be ever before him the crimson stain; it would be on his hands and he could not wash it away, nor hide it, always, always there, haunting him, his life one long horror. And when he drove the blade home, and the blood followed the steel as he wrenched it from the quivering flesh, there would come a cry—a cry of pain that would ring forever in his ears. And the eyes, ere they closed in death, would turn to him in sorrow, reproach, haunting him with the unspoken words: “And it is thou, Tito, who hast done this?”

He grasped the knife in his trembling fingers. The blade was keen and the touch chilled his blood..

“I falter,” his voice had the agony of death. “I must not! Am I of a coward race? Am I a woman to be won by soft words? Where now is thy courage, Tito, what is it they call thee,—‘*Piccolo d’Ignoti*?’ Aye, thou craven clod, aye, that is the name by which thou art known. Wouldst thou have another and better? Look to it then that thy aim is true—true as this steel blade. Strike once only—and deep. See that the knife reaches the heart, where the blood is of a deeper hue; and now—Heaven guide my hand!”

Slowly he approached the bed and, standing beside it, looked long and intently on the face of the sleeper.

“Why shouldst Thou have willed it to me, oh, God, to do this deed? Why could I not have been

TITO

of the people and worked in the fields, lived as the birds live—free? Then should my mind have been at rest, my heart clean, and I should have known only the joy of living and of loving Thee. And now—now Thou hast condemned me to take my father's life, to know but sorrow and the terrible fear that comes to the damned; and as Thou hast willed, so am I to be forever lost."

He paused, then looking at the sleeper, continued in tones of intense sorrow:

"I could have loved thee, my father, yes, and well, hadst thou cared to call me son; but hast thou not just told me I have no father? Yet, ah, God! It is hard! I tremble. What if I should fail! Pietro, I have looked upon thee as inhuman—a fiend! I have hated thee, feared thee, for the Devil is thy master. Now do I ask thee to lend me thy strength, thy courage, thy hate, for my heart sickens with fear, with dread, with—I will confess it—aye, to Heaven alone, that I must strike him whom I love. I cannot strike him in his sleep. I will wake him and cry out to him that death is here."

Firmly he clutched the knife and raised it in the air. Vanburg stirred and his lips parted:

"Tito," the tones were those of a child. "When you speak, it is her voice I hear—Bettina's."

Tito's hand fell to his side, and, with a choking sob, he turned his head away.

"I cannot, I cannot." His voice was husky; in his eyes was the awful fear of those who had faced death and chance had intervened. Vanburg's

TITO

voice had stirred him to the very depths of his soul; and he realized that the words, spoken by his father in his sleep, had saved him from the crime of parricide. An icy chill swept over him; the impulse to get away became uncontrollable and he looked about him, his eyes dilating with fear—the fear that his passion would again steel his heart to the flood of pity, of sorrow, of remorse that had stayed his vengeance.

Mechanically he placed the portrait on the chair beside the bed, then, tearing a leaf from his sketch-book, scrawled the words—"She who painted this was my mother." Signing the name, "Tito," he placed the note on the picture, then, without glancing at the sleeper, rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE dusk of evening was closing in on the city when Vanburg awoke, refreshed, but with a feeling of extreme weakness. The room was quite dark, and with a painful effort he rose and peered through the gloom. There was no sound, and realizing that he was alone, with unsteady step he groped his way to the mantel and lighted an oil lamp. In a dazed way again he looked about him—nothing but barrenness within, and the sound of the city chanting its night song through the open windows. Sitting on the edge of the bed he pressed his throbbing temples with his hands. He was confused, his brain was in a whirl and, closing his eyes, he sought to weave the incidents of the past night and day into some tangible form.

“Have I dreamed that the boy was here?”

He spoke aloud, and the sound of his voice, weak, unnatural, brought a smile to his lips.

“They must have knocked my reasoning faculties into a cocked hat, or into a cocked head. I believe the latter nearest to its present condition, for it now is of wood—pulp at that, with a filling of lead; or have I been dreaming, seeing things, hearing voices. Surely the boy was here, though as surely he is not here now. Certain am I that I

TITO

talked with him, but I suppose that, too, is one of the vagaries of a cracked head. Heigh-ho! 'the way of the transgressor'—but that is too old and worn to quote. I shall be persuading myself that I was not the presiding justice at a certain trial at Joe's—he of the House of Death. However, my head will bear evidence of the fact, even if the boy was a myth, a chimera of the brain. There are many conditions of delirium, but seeing people and conversing with them is, in my opinion, if I am now in a condition to form one, most tantalizing. There is no doubt that I am, at the present moment, very much alone; and my legs are as wobbly as my head. In fact, had I the power of locomotion left to me I would go out, if for no other purpose to collect the shattered ends of my reasoning powers; else my nerves will be playing tricks with me and I shall again be seeing things."

His hands again sought his head to ease the throbbing, and his glance rested on the portrait—the slip of paper on which Tito had written lying upon it. From where he was sitting in the dim light, he did not recognize it, but he knew it was not his, and with a painful effort he placed the picture in an upright position on the chair and, taking the paper, sank back wearily on the bed.

"Now, here is another form of delirium—a portrait in oil, and a scrap of paper beside it; a bill probably. Some considerate dealer, knowing me to be a connoisseur in art, has sent me an oil on approval, with a bill."

He laughed softly.

TITO

"Well, perhaps that is another form of seeing things that are not. Am I receiving a picture in oil with a written guarantee of the dealer that it is a genuine Titian? or will I presently awake and find that I have been dreaming again, this time delving into the realms of art?"

He glanced at the paper and with an effort read the words that Tito had written.

"I presume," he muttered, "that this is part of the illusion; this that I hold is not paper at all, neither are there words written on it, and the name signed at the foot is a mental photograph, the words being focused in my brain and, by a process unknown to science, thrown upon this paper. What I hold is not paper, neither do I see words; it is all an after-effect of a stroke of a chair, dealt by the gentleman who couldn't agree with my judgment of facts or my knowledge of law.

"The question now is how much of all this is hallucination, how much reality? Is this paper that I hold in my hand? Is the name in truth that of the boy—Tito? If it is, then he was here, and on that subject I am partially sane. 'She who painted this portrait was my mother,' he read aloud. Is the boy as mad as I? Surely he must have been here to have left this writing. I wish he would come back and tell me more of himself and his mother, and incidentally to assure me that I talked with him to-day. The picture! What is it like?"

Taking the portrait from the chair he held it so that the light fell upon the painting.

TITO

"Now!" he exclaimed hoarsely, "now I know I am mad!"

Staring at the portrait he sat as one in a trance, motionless, speechless, for a great fear was with him, and beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. Though his eyes were fixed on the bit of canvas, the colors became a blur, a mist, before his eyes, for his brain was on fire with the thought, even the certainty, that his reason had given way, that what he saw was a mental illusion—a vision, having its birth in his disordered brain. Sickening dread took possession of him, for he felt himself trembling upon the brink of an abyss that would blot out his reason, and leave all a blank.

Again he moved the canvas, and the light, falling obliquely upon it, disclosed the beauty of the portrait of the Virgin and the Child—in the corner of the painting, his own name, as he had signed it.

"Just Heaven," his voice trembled with fear, "am I to be condemned to this punishment, to see these visions? Is not the grave of her with whom my love, my life is buried, never to be closed? Am I to be tortured thus—has the brain at last begun to give way, reason to rock, leaving me a degree of sanity that will insure the torture of the damned? Be merciful, Heaven, and grant me complete oblivion,—blot out the memory and, if my body, with a grim obstinacy, clings to life, let reason die."

He had placed the picture on the chair, beside it the slip of paper and, with the strength that fear

TITO

lent him, paced the floor, a frenzy of emotions sweeping over him. His faculties were in a chaotic state, the boy standing beside the bed was to him an apparition, his memory of their conversation he attributed to the vagaries of an unbalanced mind. But the portrait? This was something tangible, something material, a substance that he could feel, could see. He dared not look at it again, for he might then read the proof of his disordered mind, of a distorted vision, and in place of the Virgin and the Child, perhaps some horrible face would leer at him from out the canvas. He could no longer stand the stillness of the room, there was madness in the air, lurking in the forbidding walls, and the sound of his own footfalls seemed to come from cavernous depths. He would go out, out into the crowd, where he could feel life about him, movement that would give balance to his reeling brain. Even as he paused in his walk, he staggered from weakness.

A step in the hall halted at the door, which was quietly opened, and McGlennon entered.

Vanburg, with eyes that spoke his fears, stared at his visitor as if he expected to see him dissolve into a mist; then, approaching, touched him with trembling fingers.

"Eh, Gad! You are not dead yet?" McGlennon said in a hearty tone.

Vanburg grasped him by the arm and led him to a chair, sitting before him on the edge of the bed.

"Mack, tell me the truth, in God's name, tell me the truth,—am I mad?"

TITO

McGlennon did not immediately reply, but looked into the staring, bloodshot eyes of the speaker. For an instant the horrible thought came to him that the blow Vanburg had received had, indeed, unsettled his reason; but in the steady, imploring eyes that met his own, he read there sanity, distorted by fear, but he saw no evidence of a disordered intellect.

"Man, what the devil's the matter with you? Of course you're not mad; though, upon my soul, the clip you received from that chair might have knocked the reason out of you, for a while, anyway."

"McGlennon, you are a man of honor; I was once, but never mind that. After hearing what I have to say, tell me on your honor if I am mad. I shall understand. You will do this for me?"

McGlennon laughed long and heartily. Vanburg's face betrayed irritation, the laugh grated on his over-wrought nerves, and he raised his hand in a gesture of impatience.

"Kent," cried McGlennon, "you're talking skittles,—rank, childish babble! I'll hear no more of it! Tell me how your head feels. Not good, I warrant. No wonder you talk a bit rattled."

"Listen to me," said Vanburg with some impatience. "Never mind my head, answer me seriously. You came home with me after the row? That I assume."

"Yes, of course."

"When did you go away?"

TITO

"This morning, after the boy came."

"Then he was here?"

"Yes, I left him here to look after you. Why the devil did he go away?"

Vanburg disregarded the question. "He was here," he spoke as if he were alone. "That much, at least, is not madness. But the other!" He reached for the paper and handed it to his companion. "Mack, in Heaven's name, read that. Read it aloud."

McGlennon read the words, then looked at Vanburg, whose face was colorless, drawn; in the past hour, ten years had been added by line and furrow, and his expression was that of one whom old age had suddenly overtaken.

"In that, too, am I sane; but,"—he took the picture in his hand—"it is here that reason has left me! Look at it, man, and tell me what you see."

With trembling hand he pushed the picture before McGlennon, and waited, a look of horror on his face.

"Speak," he said, in husky tones, while he suppressed the emotion that threatened to overcome him. "In God's name, tell me if, in this, my mind is unbalanced."

"It is the picture of the Mother and the Child—the Christ," McGlennon said quietly.

"Read the names signed at the bottom."

McGlennon read the names, then handed the canvas to Vanburg, and waited for him to speak; but he remained silent. Whatever the import of

TITO

it all, McGlennon was quick to perceive that his companion was deeply moved. Fear had given place to sorrow, and the disappointments, the pent up agony of the past years seemed to surge, to engulf, to overwhelm him. He held the portrait to the light, and, as his eyes rested upon it in a gaze of sorrow, pity, love, no other sound broke the quiet but his deep, irregular breathing. After all the years this bit of canvas had come back to him, a mysterious message from the grave, a token, a remembrance of the love, of the life he had lost; it was there to speak to him of the wasted years, to remind him of his sorrow, and to call to life all that he had buried, but that yet lived. How it again had found its way into his life, by what circuitous route, by what process of events, by what untoward circumstances Tito had placed in his hands this last memento of the life that he would forget, he could not divine. It was here, the art of the dead Bettina, the last work that she had finished. Heaven had, in the working out of its divine will, for a purpose its own given it to him again, and he questioned not its decree.

For the moment he had lost sight of the message from Tito that lay on the chair; had forgotten McGlennon; had forgotten all else but the memories that the sight of the picture had awakened. Gradually the events of the day, the advent of Tito, rose before him, and it was these that caused him to pick up the boy's message and fix his eyes on McGlennon's face, as if to read there

TITO

the solution of the mystery that confronted him. But his thoughts were confused. He could not reason with any degree of intelligence and he began to speak slowly, mechanically—his eyes turned to his companion; but the eyes were those of the blind, for the soul of the speaker was in a world where the past and memory alone existed.

"There comes a time," he said, "a first time in every man's life when he must open his heart, his very soul, to someone, and, relying on his friendship, wring his heart dry of the secrets, the troubles, the agonies, that for years, that seem as centuries, have been locked within his own breast. We have known each other long enough, have shared good luck and bad, each having had time to measure the other's worth. Explanations are not needed between us, excuses are unnecessary; yet you have been more frank with me than I merit."

Rain had begun pattering against the window, and an ominous rumbling of thunder foreshadowed a tempest. Within the room, the measured monotone of the speaker fell upon the quiet almost with a chant-like rhythm. Vanburg's listener was silent, his thoughts on the cause that had the power to stir the speaker to the very depths of his soul.

The muttering of distant thunder and the complaining roar of the city filled the interval.

"When, on a certain night," Vanburg continued, "we stood before the clubhouse and I told you

TITO

the story of the man who came to your home, he who offered you money—money which you rightly refused, told you of his wasted life, that he was socially dead, I spoke the truth, but I did not tell you all. You know the young wife, she whom he loved, died; that the child that was his hope, the child he longed for, that was to be the fulfilment of his desires, was born dead. But you did not know that the father, the husband, was telling you the story of his own life; for it was I, my friend, I, myself, of whom I spoke.”

Another silence followed, for McGlennon did not reply.

“Then the boy, Tito, entered my life, and his eyes, his voice, his features, brought before me the vision of her who gave her life at the birth of our child, and now—”

He stopped suddenly. Once more his emotions seemed to overcome him. Grasping the paper from the chair, he held it before McGlennon. Despair was in his eyes, in his voice.

“Tell me, in Heaven’s name, what does this mean? The portrait was painted by my dead wife; it is one I have not seen since her death; and I find it here, in this room, and beside it this scrap of paper, signed by the boy, saying that she who painted it was his mother.”

Grasping McGlennon by the shoulder, he shook him as if to force him to speak. The Scotchman looked into the ashen face, and the belief came to him that in the eyes he read the madness his companion feared.

TITO

"Calm yourself," he said. Laying a restraining hand on Vanburg, he gently forced him to sit on the bed. "You are overwrought, working yourself into a fever. These things will right themselves. Tell me what you know of the boy. What has he told you? He will come back and you can question him."

"No, he will not return," Vanburg interrupted. "Something tells me he will not."

"But you say the child died?"

"Yes, I was away—in Paris—on business. When I returned the old woman told me the child was born dead. The doctor took charge of the body. Bettina, my wife, lay unconscious, but revived before the end came. She, too, spoke of the child as dead. Mack, in Heaven's name, what can we do? How find the boy? He told me his story, he was sworn to find his father—to kill him for a fancied wrong. He spoke of an old woman, an aunt of his mother, of her hate, of her oath of vengeance. That portrait was in the possession of my wife's aunt. Can you not see, man, can you not understand? The boy, how can we find him? I cannot wait—"

"You will lie down and be quiet," said McGlennon. His tone was firm, his manner determined. "You are not in a fit condition to think, much less to act. You are ill, man, and no wonder. Rest, and I will go for a hot soup, and a drink of brandy. You need nourishment and quiet. After you have eaten and slept, we will talk of what can be done to find the boy."

TITO

McGlennon was about to go when Doctor Remo entered.

The doctor approached Vanburg, who was sitting beside the bed. "Well," he said, "you are not so seriously injured as I feared. You must have a constitution of iron."

Laying a finger on Vanburg's pulse he looked at him with concern.

"Why, man, you should be in bed. Your pulse is of race-horse speed."

"No, no," answered Vanburg, impatiently, "you can do me no good."

"He is excited over the disappearance of the boy," said McGlennon.

"Mac, if I were only in Florence, where I could find the old woman, Mother Malenotti! I can't sit idly here!"

"Florence! Mother Malenotti!" repeated Doctor Remo. "Did you ever live in Florence?" he asked of Vanburg.

"Yes," he replied, tersely.

"And you knew a Mother Malenotti—a mid-wife?"

"Yes. What do you know of her? Tell me! Quick, man!"

Vanburg's tone was violent. He was about to rise, but McGlennon laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"It is as I thought—as I feared," the doctor replied, musingly. Then in a louder tone: "Were—were you related to Mother Malenotti?"

TITO

"Her niece was my wife."

The doctor rose quickly and stood staring at Vanburg. He laid a trembling hand on the back of a chair. His voice was husky and almost inaudible. "It was I," he faltered, "who attended your wife when her child was born!"

With cat-like spring Vanburg freed himself from McGlennon's restraining hand.

"Answer me one question—did the child live?"

"Yes," came the answer, scarcely audible. "And you—"

McGlennon's arms wound about Vanburg, forcing him back to the bed where he sat beside him.

Doctor Remo told what he knew. He laid bare his own duplicity, nor did he try to excuse himself for the part he had taken in the deception. Again and again Vanburg sought to wrench himself free from McGlennon's grasp, but the powerful Scotchman held him close, and except by an occasional groan, Vanburg did not interrupt the recital, as the doctor continued in a subdued, even monotone. Had it not been for McGlennon, Vanburg, in his state of semi-madness, might have strangled the Italian where he stood, but the powerful arms were about him until he could neither move nor speak.

"I realized," concluded the physician, "the wrong that I had done you, but it was a question of complying with the demand of Mother Malenotti or surrendering my liberty. She had me in her power. There had been an accidental death.

TITO

Though without intent I was at fault. One word from her and I was ruined. I was forced to agree to her terms and report to you that the child was born dead. This was done because from the first there was no possibility of saving the life of the mother. I left Florence the following year, and know only that at the time of my departure the child was living in the country with Mother Male-notti."

"And you know nothing further of the boy or the old woman?" said McGlennon.

"Nothing," was the answer.

"Go!" said McGlennon, "go! do not come again."

Silently the Italian turned to go. At the door he paused. "I have offered no excuse," he said in the same low tone. "I realize the enormity of the wrong to the father. I carried out the old woman's will—it was that or disgrace."

He went out and his step echoed on the stair.

"Well," said the Scotchman, releasing Vanburg, "that's bad news and good news, more good than bad. Kent, you're weak and excited and God knows you have reason to be. Were you a well man, in a fair fight, I'll allow you could lay me on my back; but to-night you will do as I say. You're going to bed while I fetch you a hot soup. You have a son! I believe him to be the boy, Tito. Eh, Gad! That's good news enough for one night."

Vanburg did not reply, and before McGlennon's

TITO

return the sleep of exhaustion had blotted out the events of the day. Throughout the night the Scotchman sat beside the bed, watching the white face on the pillow, the muscles twitching as if in pain, the fevered brain of the sleeper traveling back through the years, while his lips formed the words, "Tito, Bettina."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Tito had left Vanburg's room, on reaching the street he turned uptown, and went on blindly, not caring where. One desire moved him—to get away, as far away, and as quickly, as he could:—anywhere that he might escape from his old passion, from the desire for revenge, and the fear that hate would again obtain the mastery. Mile after mile he put between him and the room where lay his father—the father whom he had sought, from whom he now fled to escape from the possibility of the crime, the thought of which filled him with horror.

Night was coming on quickly, banks of threatening clouds closed in over the city, and when he had left behind him the last straggling lights, it was so dark that he could scarcely see as he stumbled blindly on. The wind moaned ominously, and after he had reached the country, the trees that bordered the road sobbed, as fitful gusts of wind tore the leaves and the branches, and mutterings of thunder told the early breaking of the tempest.

He could tell by the southing of the wind through the branches, and the blackness that seemed to close in upon him, that he was passing along a wooded road. A flash of lightning threw a halo of blue flame across his way, and he turned

TITO

abruptly into a cart path winding under the overhanging boughs. Having eaten nothing since morning he was weak, tired and hungry, but it was his desire to rest in the solitude and seclusion of the wood that prompted him to turn from the road.

Weary, footsore, he threw himself at full length upon the soft grass and leaves, while the thunder rumbled over his head, and the flashes of lightning peopled the wood with unearthly forms, and from brush and tree, ghastly faces, with staring eyes, peered upon the shuddering figure on the ground; then blackness again shut out the awful sight. The rain began pattering on the leaves over his head, the wind sang a requiem through the branches, and a chorus as of a thousand lost souls chanted a response. Again the thunder pealed, discordant, threatening, until it seemed the universe was disrupted—tumbling in fragments above his head, falling, to crush him, only to slink away with growls and mutterings, then another flash and tongue of flame would disclose in bush and tree an army of grinning, uncanny dead:—on each quivering leaf a blotch of crimson blood. Closing his eyes to shut out the sight he lay quite still, and the rain, falling on his face, cooled his temples, his fevered brain—the mad throbbing ceased and again he could think.

The minutes went by, the rain increased until it became a steady downpour, wetting him to the skin; but he was unconscious of all but the sound of voices that seemed to cry over his head, wailing, lamenting:

TITO

"Tito, thou hast forgotten, thou art a coward, a coward, a coward!"

How they scoffed at him, upbraiding, taunting him, mourning for the vow he had broken, while the wind sobbed and, in the flashes of light, sightless eyes wept, their tears mingling with the down-pouring rain that washed all but the crimson stain from the leaves. Again the thunder roared and, following the army of echoes that rolled away, came the scornful, maddening laugh of the old woman, but it was a sound to chill the blood, vindictive, reproachful, her words sighing through the moaning branches. "Remember thy promise, my Tito, or thy soul will be damned. It is not too late; it is not, it is not. Thou shalt be pointed at as a coward, a coward. 'Tis the dirty blood of thy father that falters. Go back, it is not too late."

The wind shrieked the voice into silence and the rain kept up its pattering song.

"Ah, God!" muttered the boy, "Thou hast indeed deserted me. Why shouldst Thou have taught me what love was, why could not I have hated him, then I should not have faltered. Now I must run away—like a coward. I must never see him again, and through all the years and the years I shall remember him, not he who wronged me, but as I found him, alone, with the tears of gladness in his eyes. And when I am a man and try to forget the father whom I should hate, I shall feel the touch of his lips on my forehead; feel my fingers tremble with the joy of his touch, and his words will haunt me through the days and

TITO

the years—"Tito, boy, I am glad you have come back to me."

His voice choked and the tears ran down his rain-drenched face.

"My mother," he faltered, "thou wilt not blame me. No fault could have been thine, and I know that thou didst love him. If the wrong was his, thou wouldst forgive him, and I, whom he wronged as he wronged thee, can I not forget or forgive? Again will I go back to dear *Italia*, there will I be safe from the fear that the old hate will return. Never again shall I see him, never again shall I hear his voice, and he shall never know that Tito, his son, forgot the vow that he made. Tomorrow shall I seek the good friend who offered me money that I might learn to sing. Sing! Never can I sing again, for to-night the voice within me died. Yet I must, even though my heart burst. Sing I will, for the money to take me away, to *Italia*, and when I am there, will he be safe, and I—I shall die of shame!"

His head fell on his arm and his eyes closed. He slept.

The morning sun was hours high when he awoke, cold, benumbed, with a feeling that some terrible disaster had overtaken him. There was joy in the fresh air, the sunshine quivered through the branches of the trees, kissing the water on the dripping leaves into sparkling gems. He was stiff and scarcely able to move, but he walked into the warm sunshine, his wet clothing clinging to his body, his teeth chattering with the cold.

TITO

To return to Italy was his one thought. The one desire to get away, to preclude any possibility of again meeting his father took possession of his mind, and with this end in view, he decided to return to the city. Entertaining no doubt as to his ability to accomplish his purpose, his confidence in his ultimate success was complete; his brain was clear, and his plan of action well defined. Having eaten nothing for the past twenty-four hours, he was weak from lack of food and exposure, but hunger had no terrors for him—often had he done battle with it before. At the cafés in the Italian quarter a welcome always awaited him, for he had sung himself into the hearts of his compatriots, and his sigh of satisfaction was in response to the thought that there he would be met with kind words and smiles—coin of the heart's mintage.

Walking with rapid, swinging gait, he hoped to arrive at the home of Ned Hollander in time to see him before he left for his office. To his rain-soaked clothing he gave no thought, and he was unconscious that he presented a sorry, bedraggled appearance. As he went on, the noise and bustle of the city was as a greeting from an old friend, stirring his young blood, lifting the cloud that seemed to envelop him, and holding out something akin to hope.

Ringling the bell, the servant who opened the door eyed him with amused suspicion, then, leaving Tito standing in the outer hall, went in search of his master.

TITO

Tito almost smiled at his own audacity, yet he was proudly conscious that his mission was not one of charity. He had something to sell—the art that the good God had given him, and, when he was bidden to enter, met Ned Hollander's smiling welcome with the easy grace of an equal.

"Ah, Tito, I am truly glad to see you. A moment later and you would have missed me."

Tito had caught a glimpse of his own forlorn figure in a mirror, and the blood mounted to his cheeks, for his anxiety had crowded out all thought of his personal appearance.

"I have been out," he said apologetically, "in the rain of last night. Thou wilt not be offended that I am wet—" he cast a look of concern at his mud-besmeared clothes and boots—"and muddy? But I wished much to see thee. Thou wilt not mind that I look ill?"

"Not I," Ned laughed. "How comes it that you were out in the rain?"

"That I cannot tell thee," Tito replied. "It was nothing, only that I look like a sweep. What I would know is, if thou wouldst have me sing—sing for thy friends? I must tell thee that I would go to *Italia*—to my home; and I must earn money, for I would go soon. Thou wert kind to offer me money that I might learn; wilt thou be kind now, and, at thy club, for thy friends, will I sing. They are rich, and if I sing well, will they pay me—that I may go to *Italia*."

"My dear boy, of course I'll help you," was the

TITO

impulsive response. "If you are in trouble I will give you—"

"No, no," interrupted Tito, stoutly, "that I will not; but I will earn it, aye, and I will sing as never before,—and never again," he added in a faltering voice.

"To-night, then, at the club. You will come here, come early, and to Italy you shall go. Now isn't there something I can do for you to-day?"

"Nothing," replied Tito. "You are kind. I will go, and to-morrow—could I get a ship to-morrow?"

"Yes, there is a boat for Mediterranean ports to-morrow. But why so soon, Tito?"

"Ah! that I cannot tell thee, but when I shall have money to pay for the passage, then shall I go. If it were only to-day!"

His voice and his eyes spoke of sorrow that his listener was quick to perceive. With a parting good-bye, Tito ran lightly down the steps and was gone.

Attired in a neat fitting suit of clothes, which had been provided by Ned Hollander, who, with delicate tact, had pointed out to Tito that his own was hardly appropriate for the occasion, in the early evening he entered the club-house with his benefactor.

Here were his father's one-time friends; here, too, was where this same father was wont to come, the equal of any, the mental superior of many another who had forgotten that he still lived—here

TITO

now walked his son with the unconscious bearing of one to the manner born.

Many questioning eyes were turned upon him, many were the admiring glances that followed him, as, with his sponsor, he walked from room to room, receiving the same formal introduction, the same courtesy that would be extended to an honored guest. Many were the eyes that rested on the handsome face, to which excitement had lent a ready flush, which had power only to soften the expression of sorrow, to veil the look of sadness in the eyes, giving to him a subdued, even melancholy air, an added distinction to Nature's mould of an aristocrat. With an ease of manner that was inborn, he met those who were old in the world's knowledge, fitting into his environment as if luxury had been his by right; observing much, saying little, but conquering the hearts of those who saw him and marveled.

Entering the library with his companion, they stood before the portraits of the past members of the club, Hollander answering his questions, pointing out to him, meanwhile, those of whom the world had heard much.

Tito listened, silent, for his eyes were fixed in an incredulous stare upon Vanburg's portrait, one of a group in a frame containing twenty or more of the former members of the club.

"Whose—whose picture is that?" he asked, indicating his father's portrait.

His voice was unsteady, but he spoke in a low tone.

TITO

"His name is Vanburg," Ned replied.

"He—he is living?" Tito asked.

"Yes, I believe he is. He has not been here for many years. Poor fellow, poor Van."

"Thou knew him well? Was there some misfortune? Thou speakest of him with pity."

"Yes. His life was blotted out. You could not understand, Tito."

"Tell me of him."

The boy's tone was one of entreaty. In his eyes there was supplication, and in the excitement of the moment his unguarded desire was made manifest to his companion. Ned regarded him with amused interest. He considered the request that of one whose emotional instincts had been awakened by his recital of Vanburg's downfall; and in a few words he told the history of the boy's father. Tito listened, his color, in waves, coming and going, his breathing deep, his eyes responding to every detail—grief, regret, humiliation, alternately sweeping over his mobile countenance.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in tones of sorrow, "there must have been some cause, some trouble. Was—was he married?" he asked tremulously.

"No," answered his companion. A convulsive shudder swept the boy's frame. His features hardened, and turning abruptly away he asked:

"Wilt thou have me sing now?"

"Are you anxious to conquer, to triumph?" asked Hollander, laughing.

"No, but if I delay, I fear that I shall fail. Let it be now!"

TITO

The voice was steely, the lines about the mouth were drawn, and the eyes told of mental suffering.

He stood beside the piano, and a few introductory notes drew the attention of all to the singer, for it was known that Hollander had made a promise which required talent of a high order to redeem.

The power that had swayed the emotional Florentine artists, that had stirred the hearts of Ned Hollander and his sister with a new-found delight, that had brought tears into the eyes of Vanburg—tears of regret, of love, of sorrow—this power seized upon those who listened to the voice that was now tender, now passionate,—tones vibrating with love, with hate, sinking to a sigh or rising with the wild abandon of one who flings defiance to the world. In spirit, the singer was alone—alone in the fields and woods of Tuscany; the rippling notes of the piano, subdued, but ever supporting the voice, was the echo of the Arno through the sunlit summer days, and the evenings, with the purple Apennines touching the sky that was the dome of his world, his heaven. The story he was telling in song was of the heart-burnings of his childhood, of his sorrowful quest, of the father he had found to love—to lose. He did not see the faces before him, the soft lights were the reflection of the sun sinking in a blaze behind the mountain peaks of his own Tuscany, melting into a haze of iridescent color as the ready tears filled his eyes. He did not hear the applause, the words of praise fell upon his ears a buzzing sound—vague, meaningless.

TITO

Again and again he sang, but his heart was with the unconscious sleeper whom he had left so short a time before, though now it seemed ages, his life separated from the past by a limitless gulf.

He was singing, he believed, his last song, for the last time, the one to which Vanburg had listened, the one which Bettina had loved, had sung. With an effort he had controlled his voice, but it wavered, faltered, and the last lingering note ended in a sob,—the tears streaming down his cheeks. He turned away to hide his emotion, but there were other eyes than his that were moist, other lips that quivered, other hearts that had responded to the pathetic appeal. It was no time for applause; a sigh, almost of relief, swept his hearers, and the tribute to his art was deeper than words could voice.

"Let me go now," he begged.

"Come with me into the café," urged Hollander gently.

Together they entered the café and Ned, divining Tito's desire, led him to a retired seat.

Placing a glass of wine before him, he bade him drink and rest until he should return.

Tito drank the wine, and to those who spoke to him—gently, affectionately, he answered with smiling face but sorrowing eyes; and with Hollander's return he prepared to go.

A sealed envelope was placed in his hands, with the request that it should not be opened until he returned to his lodgings.

TITO

"My address is within the envelope," he was told, "you will write to me?"

"Yes," Tito answered, "thou hast been very good to me. I will not forget."

"Good luck to you! God has been good to you, my boy; with your voice, you can command the world."

"When I am in dear Tuscany by the Arno, I shall never care to sing again."

He went out into the night and the city sang to him its never ending song.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM the promenade deck of an ocean steamer, Tito watched the receding shores of America, as they melted into a haze on the horizon—his eyes, dreamy, wistful, lingered where the city faded from his sight. He caught his breath sharply, and a sigh of regret was borne back, a last message of sorrowing love. He could not steel his heart against the sorrow he felt at leaving—feelings that filled him with a profound melancholy, crying to him that all hope in life was left behind.

Too late to return now and answer the promptings of the years of hate he had outlived, too late to fulfil the vow he had made and broken, too late to avert the scorn, the shame, the degradation which awaited him on his return.

He shuddered. He pictured the dark visaged, relentless Pietro, his eyes shooting gleams of hate, as he demanded of him if he had kept his vow. He could see the low, contracted forehead, the ugly scar on the cheek, the thin, compressed lips, the almost beardless face, the set, murderous expression, which, in the years he had known him, had never relaxed, nor, in that time, had a smile ever softened its lines. Stamped on the boy's mind was the awful expression, the lips scarcely moving as,

TITO

at parting, he hissed into his ear a warning never to receive his first communion till he had wrought the vengeance that was his by right, by the will of God. "See!" the old man cried, pointing to the scar that disfigured his face, "this was the mark of one whose life I swore should be the balm to heal it. Years I sought him, till, at last, my knife found his heart. Only then did the scar heal. Thy wrong was greater than mine."

A chill seemed to creep over the boy, clutching at his heart;—a sensation of horror to take possession of him. This, in turn, gave place to compassion, an indefinable regret, and try as he would, he could not stifle emotions which, unbidden, filled him with a keen sorrow, nor could he banish from his mind the one with whom he had parted forever, whom he had learned to love. Like a spectre, the face haunted him, and the words rang in his ears, "Tito, you have come back to me."

And now, now he was returning to the life that he should never have left—to the taunts and the heart-burnings. He must bear the dishonor humbly, for was it not of his own choosing? and having relinquished his right to demand satisfaction, he must remain silent, for he had surrendered his claim to manhood. Still the thought came to him, and it thrilled his soul with a new-found joy, that he had spared the life he had sworn to take,—of that his defamers could not rob him. And his pulses quickened, for the thought was dear, and a wondrous feeling of exaltation took possession of him.

TITO

The land had disappeared and the steamer was lifting to the ocean swell. Turning from the rail of the ship he descended to the saloon, for he was a first-cabin passenger, and, to direct his thoughts into pleasanter channels, as well as to acquaint himself with the luxurious surroundings, he explored the steamer from its upper deck to as far below as the rules would permit.

When, the night before, Tito had opened the envelope given him by Ned Hollander, at first his amazement had given place to doubt, then to a feeling of guilt that he had, though without his sanction, become an object of charity. This was revolting to him, but after having read, by a laborious effort, the letter enclosed, his over-sensitive feelings were soothed.

The envelope contained a first-class ticket to Genoa, and a sum of money out of all proportion, the boy believed, to what should have been his reward. But the letter written by Hollander assuaged the boy's pride, and the following day found him on the steamer in possession of funds sufficient for weeks, even months, to come.

The days dragged slowly; for after the first novelty had passed, his interest lagged, and even the passengers failed to awake more than slight notice, and mental observations that were caustic and sweeping in his disregard for their high-bred assumption of superiority. Keenly alive to what was new and strange, he absorbed knowledge readily; ever on the alert, unobtrusive, observing, reticent, a boy in years, with the wisdom of a man.

TITO

He had leisure now to think, and during the still nights, when a mysterious calm settled over the sea, the steamer forging ahead over the watery waste, the voice of an almighty power whispered its secrets to him.

When all was quiet below, and the decks were clear, the moonless sky above him, he sat alone on the upper deck, his thoughts with the father, who, perhaps, lay unconscious, perhaps dying. The tears would trickle down his cheeks, and his choking sobs were a tribute to his great love. The look in Vanburg's eyes—a look of appeal, entreaty, love, haunted him; and the voice seemed to come from the sea. "Tito, my own Tito." Why had the remembrance the power to wring his young heart, why were the words ever in his ears, the tones gentle as a woman's, while the tender, compassionate look in the eyes of the man as he bent over him when he lay on the bed with a wounded arm, tortured him with a sense of his own ingratitude. With a start and a sudden resolve he would spring to his feet as though to turn back, to throw himself at the feet of the father who had wronged him and confess all, to beg forgiveness for the vow he had made, to call him father, to see his eyes light up with the joy that his words would bring, and to again hear him cry out, "Tito, you have come back to me."

But it was too late. Every throb of the screw bore him farther away from him who was waiting, always waiting, his return. He was alone with the night and the sea, and the waves lapping the

TITO

sides of the ship sobbed in sympathy with his grief, the soft night wind chiding him for the life and the love he had cast aside. What would become of this new-found father, alone in that dreary room, no human being near who had the power to save him from his downward career? For the boy had seen enough to convince him that his father was seeking oblivion in drink. How could it be that this father had wronged him, he, whose voice, when speaking of his mother—the dead Bettina—shook with emotion? Had he not, when he lay unconscious, and listened to the voice that he thought was hers, awakened? Had not her name the power to bring him to life?

Tito pressed his hands against his temples and tried to think, to reason, but the declaration of Vanburg that he had no son, set his thoughts and emotions revolting. Then the recollection of what awaited him on his return rose before him, the taunts, the gibes, the insults, and the old feelings of hate and passion swept over him. The old woman's hateful features seemed to leer at him in the gloom, he saw the scarred, vindictive face of Pietro, and he heard the voices of the night in taunting whispers: "Coward, *Piccolo d'Ignoti*, so you have come back—nameless."

It was the night before the steamer arrived at Genoa. The breeze from the land sighed with languorous warmth, and as they neared the entrance to the outer bay, the sea murmured a greeting.

Tito was on deck. Throughout the voyage he

TITO

had kept much to himself, repulsing all advances, refusing to enter into conversation with the passengers; and they, in turn, noting his disinclination to talk, after the first few days, left him to himself.

"*Italia, dear Italia,*" he murmured absently, "much as I love thee, thou hast no welcome for me—Tito. Is there not one in all this beautiful land who will be glad to see the 'Little Devil' again? Aye, Maria, and the good artist, in Florence; he will be pleased, yet will he also be sorry, for he will look into my eyes and there will he read that the heart within me is dead. It is as he said,—that America would strangle the joy, the soul, and when I would return, the beauty in life for me would be gone. It is even so. The birds will sing, but I shall not hear them; the flowers will be as bright as when I left them, but to me their beauty will be withered. The river will babble as I have often heard it, but it will be a song of sorrow. And it will be saying to me always the words: 'Tito, come back to me, come back to me.'"

"Why, oh, why does not the ship come to the land, that I may get away! I shall like better the train when it rushes on and on. The ship is ever going, going, going, and always, always away from him,—him whom I shall never see again. *Madonna Mia*, teach me what God is, that I may speak with Him, pray to Him! Would he hear me, me, Tito, the 'Little Devil?' Then will I ask of Him this favor—as He gave back the life of him whom I call father, wilt thou, *Madonna*, guard him, save him? and if he has erred, if he has done

TITO

wrong, let me answer for it, *Madonna Mia*, for my sin is greater than his."

The lip trembled and the sturdy frame shook with a convulsive sob, yet there took possession of the boy a feeling of peace, of calm, a sweet contentment for, in his heart, hate had died, and, as if a great light had entered his life, there came to him the wonderful experience of the birth of faith, the mystery of the Divine Being.

An elation seemed to encompass his heart, his soul; his pulses throbbed, his heartbeats quickened, and an ecstasy, as though some unlooked-for good fortune had overtaken him, thrilled his being.

"The good *Madonna* guard him."

He whispered the words again and again, and as if in answer to the prayer, as if the telegraphy of human hearts held distance as naught, more than three thousand miles away, a man, lonely and sorrowful, was raising his heart to Heaven in the words: "Be merciful, oh God;—Tito, come back to me!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GAIN Tito walked through the streets of Florence. The night was well advanced when he arrived, after a journey from Genoa that was a torture to him. Tired and hungry though he was, he had no inclination to eat, and, walking listlessly along the street, he took but slight interest in what was going on about him.

Lights flashed, music struck upon his ear, for Florence was alive to its pleasures, and the cafés and promenades were filled with gaily dressed throngs, chatting, laughing in the manner of true Florentines. But all this jarred upon him and fretted his nerves; his face was drawn, his step heavy, and he went on listlessly.

He was passing by the place where, upon his former visit, he had first discovered the loss of his purse. He stopped in his walk and a smile played about the corners of his mouth. Instinctively he felt for his money, but his experience in the past year had taught him much, and his smile resolved into his old-time rippling laugh.

"It is here," he said softly, "that I missed my good gold pieces, here also was where I discovered that I was hungry, aye, as never before. Would I not like to meet the clod who stole my money?"

TITO

Aye, that I would! And I would wreak my vengeance upon his dolt head! Ah! But I will have no such good luck! He is in the fields tending swine, yet he is happier than I—even better than I, though he be a thief.”

Again he walked on, pausing before the café where he had first met his artist friend. Again the strains of music came through door and window, and he listened as he had on the night when he had sung outside on the pavement; yet now, how different! His step was heavy, his eyes expressionless, his bearing that of one who had suffered a loss that left his future hopeless. Silently he turned away. No responsive chord in his heart answered to the strains of music, which formerly had the power to set the blood tingling through his veins, his pulses to quicken, his whole being to thrill with delight. The music that was wont to stir him to the very depths of his soul, now fell upon his ear a jargon of meaningless sounds; more, it annoyed him, and turning abruptly away, he hurried on to his lodgings.

The next morning Tito was astir early. To make a pilgrimage to the original of the painting which he had left with Vanburg, and to visit his friend the artist, were the missions that detained him; when this was accomplished, it was his intention to hurry on to his home without further delay. Knowing what he had to undergo before he could again renew his old life, he wished to meet his old associates, that the worst might be over, and he

TITO

could then begin life anew. But more than all he dreaded his meeting with Pietro. Night and day he saw before him the fierce scowl, the eyes blazing with hate, with passion, with vindictiveness, the old man's voice hissing the words between clenched teeth: "Thou art a coward, a dishonor to thy race!" and the boy knew that he could give no excuse, could utter no word in palliation of his failure, only such as would disclose his love for the father. That he had failed, that he returned doubly dishonored in the eyes of those who knew of his mission—this would stamp him a coward; but to acknowledge the cause of relinquishing his vow, would brand him as worse than a traitor. Besides, knowing as he did the spirit of the Vendetta which dominated Pietro, somehow he had a fear lest the old man, with the impulsive ardor of his race, would take upon himself the accomplishment of the vengeance which he had renounced. At the thought terror seized him. What if Pietro should fulfil the vow that he had forsworn?

With these thoughts in his mind, Tito was passing the cathedral, and the organ music, with the chanting of the choir, arrested his steps. Entering the church, he knelt in a pew in the centre aisle.

The organ pealed forth the Gloria of Mozart's Mass, the choir sang the inspired music with an exaltation of religious fervor, the stately magnificence of the ritual of the Roman church, in harmony with the sombre vastness of the grand interior and the softened light, lent an unearthly halo

TITO

to the moving forms on the altar. The service proceeded, it was High Mass, and the intoning of the priest was answered by responses that died into an echo.

Still the boy knelt as one in a dream—entranced. His body was of earth, but his soul had gone out to the Unknown—groping in the dark at the portals of the kingdom of Faith. He tried to pray, but his faculties were benumbed, his mind in chaos, and only the words framed themselves in his brain, in his heart: *Madonna*, forgive me and guard his life. Hear me, *Madonna*! At last I have found God!"

The procession on the altar moved on to the left and entered the vestry; the congregation slowly filed out of the church, the music died into a soft tremolo, the last note vibrating through the vast edifice—Tito was alone, kneeling in a state of rapture, his eyes fixed on the altar at the far end of the church.

Was it imagination, a chimera of an overwrought brain, or did a mist form above the altar, gradually increasing until silvery, shimmering clouds seemed to float, to move, to intermingle, the colored lights through the stained windows lending fantastic colors that played upon the moving mass, iridescent, scintillating?

Still he knelt, powerless to move, his eyes, bulging from their sockets, fixed on the altar.

Gradually the moving mass became still, drifting in a cloud, and from its centre appeared what at

TITO

first seemed the outlines of a human form. The mist thickened, gathered at the centre, and a face of such beauty as he had never seen shone from out the encompassing cloud, the lips parting in a smile as if about to speak. Soon the full figure was outlined in the hazy mist—a hand of marvelous whiteness and beauty pointing above.

For a minute the vision was poised in the vaporous cloud, then melted before his eyes, the mist dissolved and nothing remained but the sunlight struggling through the windows.

He rose, bewildered, but a feeling of quiet peace had taken possession of his heart and mind; and as he slowly went out into the bright sunlight, he felt that some rare good fortune had suddenly come to him. Going directly to the *Palazzo Vecchio*, he sought the portrait of Lippi's *Madonna*, and, standing before the famous painting, again looked upon what had been the model his mother had used, before which his father had stood when they had signed the portrait.

"Ah! my mother," he said, softly, "couldst thou speak to me to-day, wouldst thou not say that I had done right? Thou wouldst not blame me because I spared the life of him whom thou loved? Thou wouldst not have me bear the curse, had I wrought the vengeance I had sworn? Thou who wert so beautiful, so good? I know thou wouldst not, my dear mother; and when to-day I prayed to the good God to preserve him, I felt that thou, too, joined with me. It was thou, my mother, who

TITO

came to me in the church, and thou smiled, for thou wert pleased, and, couldst thou speak, well I know wouldst thou say: 'Tito, thou hast done right; henceforth will the good God be near thee.' Now will I go to the fields and work, and none shall know, and he will live in peace, this father, even though he will not call me son."

Sorrowfully he turned away and was about to go out through the main entrance when, in descending the steps, he was grasped by the arm, and his artist friend, holding him close, warmly embraced him.

"Tito!"

Holding the boy at arm's length, he looked at him searchingly.

"Yes, it is I, Tito," was the reply.

"It is Tito in the flesh; 'Little Devil,' it is as I feared! America has killed the soul within thee. The fire in thine eyes is dead. *Fanciullo Mio*, why didst thou ever go? Come, this is no place to talk. We will go to the café, and thou shalt tell me what I already know—that the heart within thee is dead."

Together they went to the café where, once before, in the bright sunshine, the artist had listened as the boy poured out the fulness of his young heart. Words were not necessary now to tell the boy's companion that, for him, the future offered nothing on which hope could live. The eyes, the voice, the features, spoke of sorrow that struck into his very soul, and with the instinct of

TITO

his craft, the artist read the story of a life blighted at the outset. The smile was gone, the fire in the eyes, which a year ago had power to rouse the artist instinct in his companion, was extinguished. Nothing remained but the settled calm of one who had surrendered to the edict of the world's curse.

"'Little Devil,'" said the artist, after they had drunk a glass of wine, "is it not as I have said? Thou hast come back to thine own *Italia*, but the sunlight has gone out of thy life; and to thee the beauty of the world is gone, for thou no longer livest. America has strangled thy young life, so young, of such promise! *Madonna*, that it should be so! Tell me, thy father—"

"He lives," said the boy simply.

"Then is the *Madonna* kind! Thou hast seen him?"

"Yes."

In simple language, in tones that were an echo of the Tito of the Arno, the boy told his story, all that had occurred since he had last parted with his friend. The sorrow in his voice, more eloquent than his words, betrayed his depth of feeling. Calmly, dispassionately, he spoke of his father, yet, unconsciously a note of pride, even of joy, disclosed to his listener more than he intended, and a feeling of confident hope filled the heart of the artist. The man who listened with eager ear, trained to measure men by the varying intonations of the voice, as well as by a judging eye, caught the occasional vibrant note of affection and, with

TITO

exultation, awaited the termination of Tito's story. In the germ of love that had taken root in the boy's heart he saw the working out of his salvation, and listened, without interruption, to the end.

"And now," concluded Tito, "nothing is left but the old life of shame. I return as I went away—nameless. That I have a father, yes, but one who says he has no son; so again must I meet the taunts; but I cannot beat them as I did, for they have the right to call me coward. I shall go into the fields and work, and forget."

The artist smiled.

"Tito, 'Little Devil,' the good *Madonna* has guarded thee. When I first saw thee at the church door, I feared thou hadst returned with the curse of blood upon thy hands. If I loved thee before, now thou art, in truth, my son. Thou shalt yet study art with me, for the heart within thee is not dead, this father—"

"No, no," replied Tito, the first sign of animation in voice and manner, "no. This father is nothing to me. Have I not told thee that he said he has no son?"

Again the artist smiled. Time, he knew, and the wondrous workings of the miracle of love, would accomplish what words could not bring about. After they had eaten they went to one of the galleries, and throughout the long afternoon Tito's companion talked to him of art, pointing out to the boy what he might accomplish by study and work.

TITO

Tito listened with growing interest, and under the influences of the cheering words of the artist, forgot his sorrow for the time being. The expression on his face changed, his eyes lighted up with the old-time fire, and his laugh rang out with boyish abandon.

Night found them standing by the Arno, where, a year ago, the boy poured out his life-story and the artist had listened to his vow. The river sang its ceaseless song, the last lingering rays of sunset touched the tower of the *Palazzo Vecchio*, the twilight deepened and night came quickly. And the boy, with voice tuned in harmony with the languorous summer night, spoke of America, telling the story of his father's encounter with the thief, and of how, with a woman's tenderness, he had nursed him through his week of illness. Concluding, his tones thrilling with pride, he described his father as a physical god, a hero before whom all men should bow, and the night shadows hid the smile of pleasure and satisfaction on the face of his listener.

"Tito, to-morrow you will return home?"

"Yes," answered the boy, sadly. The thought of home brought to mind the scarred features of Pietro, and his voice reflected his feeling of repugnance as he thought of the welcome that awaited him.

"But thou shalt not remain there," said the artist, "thou shalt return to me and begin thy life work. Nay! Do not protest, 'Little Devil,' it must be as I say."

TITO

They talked far into the night. The moon dipped behind the western hills, the stars, mounted on the crest of the distant Apennines, shone with unusual brilliancy, and the repose of midnight settled over the city.

Tito and his companion walked leisurely homeward. They paused before Tito's lodgings, and the artist bade him an affectionate "good-night."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IT was high noon of the following day, and Tito walked up the gravel path leading to the door of his old home. The shutters were closed and the door locked, but this he expected, for he had learned at the village that Pietro was away at work, twenty miles in the country, and would not return until the following Sunday. He had received the information with a feeling of satisfaction, even of joy, for he dreaded the meeting with his uncle. Tito was aware of the affection, the fierce love with which the old man regarded him. It is with such love a wild beast guards its young, it is such love that makes heroes of men, or, when thwarted, turns one of Pietro's nature into a fiend.

During the years the old woman had trained Tito's mind in viciousness, Pietro had silently watched the growth of the boy's hate, meanwhile lavishing upon him a wild, idolatrous love, only such as those who are childless, who have lived a simple, though semi-barbarous life, can feel, can know; and there was no time during Tito's childhood that, if occasion arose, the old man would not have laid down his life for the boy, and with his dying breath have thanked the *Madonna*.

Maria, too, he must meet; gentle, trusting little Maria, who had shared his boyish secrets, his joys

TITO

and his sorrows,—his champion who had dared the displeasure of those who had cast aspersions on his birth. She, he knew, would, as she always had, stand by him, and with a thrill of pride, which was love knocking at the door of his young manhood, he anticipated his meeting with her.

It was no difficult matter for him to gain an entrance to the house, and once inside, he swung open the door and the shutters of the windows—the bright sunlight dissolving the gloom within.

Walking about the room, with a feeling of affection he handled every familiar article and, lovingly, laid them again in their accustomed places. All was as he had left it, even to the broken crucifix on the mantel, where it had lain since the night when, carried away by passion, he had dashed it against the wall. What had come and gone since that day, how his young life had changed! Then with the arrogance of full-blooded youth, his passion fostered by the old woman's hate, he had listened to the tales of the vendetta that old Pietro instilled into his mind. Now—sorrow, remorse; yet, underlying it all, a fire he could not quench, a voice that would not be stilled, the cry of love for his father—the father whom he should hate. Try as he might, he could not, for any length of time, put from him the vision of the man lying unconscious on the bed. Even in his dreams his father's words haunted him, and, with a start, he would wake and listen, and believing himself again in Vanburg's room, put out his hand to make sure that his father was

TITO

not with him. Would this memory live? Through all the years must he hear the voice, the entreating tones striking upon his very heart-strings with their longing tenderness? Would the love struggling in his breast die, and the hate that was his heritage return? Or, in the years of sorrow, of misery, which lay before him, would the voice, tinged with reproach, ask him why, without a word, he had left him—left him while he slept, leaving behind the portrait that was as a message from the grave?

Tito, standing by the mantel, raised the broken crucifix in the air; a sob preceded his words.

"*Madonna*, wilt thou guard him? If he still thinks of Tito, if he should know that the 'Little Devil' is the son he disowns, wilt thou tell him that the hate is dead—tell him, *Madonna Mia*, that—that I love him."

Kissing the crucifix, he placed it on the mantel, then with the tears still glistening in his eyes, went out again into the bright sunlight.

But one of his years could not long withstand the influences and the beauty of Nature, the rolling plain sloping to the Arno—the Arno of his youth, of his dreams.

With light foot he ran through the fields, bounding over hedges, plunging into the wood where every tree and stone was as an old friend. Gradually he neared the river singing its song of joy, as when he had sat beside it last.

"Dear old friend," he said, "thou wilt sing to-morrow as to-day. Thou dost not care if all the

TITO

vows ever made were broken—thou, whose song never ceases—a song of joy for those whose hearts are glad, tuning thy voice in harmony with those who sorrow. And with thy siren song, those who are tired of the world dost thou woo to thy bosom, enveloping them with thy watery mantle, chanting a requiem for the dead as they do in church. Sing now to me a tune of sorrow, for the Tito that thou didst know is no more, the songs that he sang for thee he has forgotten, and never again shalt thou hear his voice. Dost thou not heed me, Arno? for thou babblest on as though sorrow was not for thee. Wilt thou, too, desert me, and because of the promises I made to thee, that I have broken, wilt thou, like the others, cry to me that I am a coward? Ah, even now, I can hear thy voice, singing the words: ‘Little coward, little coward.’ Wilt thou always sing thus to me? Hast thou forgotten how I loved thee? Sing to me those other words that I always hear—‘Tito, come back to me, come back.’ ”

Twilight, like a blanket of gorgeous hue, enveloped the valley when he returned home and, after a supper of bread and wine, lay down and slept—sleeping as they sleep whom exhaustion overpowers.

Early the next morning he was on his way to find Maria, for he must tell her all, and hear, from her own lips, that she would not look upon him with scorn.

Passing through the straggling street of the village, he was met by those whom he knew, and

TITO

they lost no time in hailing him to learn his exact social status since his return.

"Well, *Piccolo d'Ignoti?*"

Notwithstanding Tito's good resolutions, the offender got no further, for the boy, with blazing eyes and flushed face struck out with lightning quickness, and his tormentor, the blood streaming from his nose, measured his length on the dusty road. He was a head taller than Tito, his senior by several years; and it was only by the suddenness of the attack that Tito gained the advantage. But his blood was aroused, and the Tito of old was in command. It was not alone the personal insult that he resented, for the words were a reflection on him for whom he would have done battle to the death. His blood was afire; he would deliver an object lesson, and eager to practice the art of which his father was a past-master, before his tormentor was well on his feet, a stinging blow between the eyes again sent him reeling in the dust, where Tito, springing upon his fallen foe, considerably rubbed his nose in the dirt.

"Now, pig," quoth Tito, to the forlorn looking figure in the roadway, "you shall kneel there and beg my forgiveness. Do you hear? There shall you stay until wisdom comes to you and unlooses a civil tongue in your head, and as you have not wit enough to use it, will I teach you."

The culprit was about to rise when Tito, standing over him, assumed a threatening attitude.

"Blockhead," cried the enraged Tito, "if you dare to get on your feet till you ask my forgive-

TITO

ness, I will cut your dirty ears off with this knife," and he flashed "Micky de Pinch's" knife in the air. But his anger quickly melted into a smile at the look of terror on the dirt-covered visage in the roadway, and, putting the knife in his pocket, his merry laugh rang loud and clear.

The apology came, but not being broad enough, nor couched in language sufficiently abject, the punctilious Tito dictated the words which his victim repeated after him. Satisfied, Tito bade him get up out of the dirt.

"Now, go and tell the others what they may expect. They shall call me Tito, nothing else, and should their memory need jogging, let them look upon your nose. I learned in America how to dress pigs."

With a lordly air he strode down the road, not deigning further notice of his groveling adversary.

This was a poor beginning after his return, and no sooner was he out of sight of the scene of his conflict, than his conscience cried to him that he was still the "Little Devil."

The priest met him before the church door and regarded the boy with a scowl.

"Well, *Demonietto* you have come back. No better, I'll warrant!"

"No better," replied the boy calmly, "but thou wilt teach me. *Parroco*, I would go to my first communion."

"What?" cried the priest. He regarded the boy with a skeptical air. "You are not practicing your old tricks?"

TITO

"No," was the reply. What, thought Tito, would he say, could he see him whom I left in the road. At the remembrance he nearly laughed in the good man's face.

"If you are sincere and have the fear of God in your heart, you make me happy," said the priest gravely.

Instantly Tito sobered. The memory of his position rushed over him with overwhelming force. In the eyes that sought those of the priest, there was entreaty, supplication.

"Good *Parroco*, truly have I changed, for trouble is with me, trouble that will not mend. I have learned much since I have been gone. I have prayed to the *Madonna*, and the good Mother has taught me what God is. Wilt thou hear me confess, good *Parroco*? for I would receive my first communion."

"Come to me, my son, on Saturday, and on Sunday morning shalt thou receive thy first communion. Till then, God be with thee, boy."

Tito lifted his cap and went on in search of Maria, his heart filled to overflowing, wishing that Sunday might come that he could begin his new life. But apparently the message given to his late adversary had not been promulgated, for when opposite the home of his good friend, the doctor, he was hailed from across the street.

"Thou hast found thy father! Dost know what thy name is?"

After Tito's interview with the priest he was determined to submit to insult rather than again

TITO.

resort to violence, but this new line of attack non-plused him. Now it was his father. Tingling with passion, he hesitated, but determined to go on. A second voice interrupted:

"He found him in jail! What is his number, '*Demonietto*'?"

This was too much, and the good resolutions were again forgotten. Quickly he crossed the street, and remembering the punishment his father had administered to the thieves, he struck out fast and furious.

There was concerted action on the part of the enemy and, three to one, the battle waged, one of the number biting the dust while the other two, with a rush, hurled Tito to the ground. Again and again he sprang to his feet, attacking them in turn, blood flowing from face and hands; but the unequal struggle was telling against him, and he could not long withstand the combined forces. His strength was nearly exhausted, the blood streamed from his face, his clothing torn and covered with dust.

There was a sound of some one running, and, hatless, with flashing eyes, Maria stood before his tormentors.

"For shame," cried the girl, "there is not one of you who dare stand before him alone. See! It takes three of you—you cowards. Tito, why wilt thou fight with them—and thou came not to me, when I have waited for thee a year. Hast thou forgotten thy Maria?"

TITO

"No," replied the boy, and turning from his tormentors, he warmly embraced her.

"You fight like goat-herders," said Tito, turning to his adversaries. "I will meet you singly, then will I teach you the art, and, if you be slow to learn, will I hammer it into your dolt heads. Come, Maria," and together they started through the fields for the river.

They said little till they were seated by the Arno in one of their favorite nooks, after Tito had washed the blood from face and hands; then, sitting beside her, the boy looked into the eyes that were fixed upon him with longing, tender love.

"Art thou still my Maria?" he asked gently.

"Ah, Tito, I waited and waited for thee! Why didst thou not come back to me before? And when I asked Pietro: 'Will he come soon?' his eyes would snap fire and he would answer, 'No! He will never come while the father lives.' And oh, Tito, he would look so savage, and the scar on his face would grow red—like blood. And I would shudder and run away. I knew what he meant, and I prayed and prayed. Ah! The Madonna must have heard. Tell me, my Tito, is thy father—"

"I have broken my vow," answered the boy simply.

"Thank the *Cristo*," murmured Maria fervently.

"Ah, the *Madonna* heard!"

"But," exclaimed Tito, his face flushing with the thought, "I have come back as I went away—nameless. And they will scoff at me, call me a

TITO

coward, aye, worse, and I must say nothing, for it will be true. And Pietro will curse me, for, on my mother's side, am I not of his blood? But, Maria, when I had found the father who disowns me, I could not—"

"Tell me of him, Tito, tell me all. It is naught to me that thou hast no father. Do we not love each other? And we will go far away from here where no one will know, and work in the fields."

Tito told her of his search for his father, of their first meeting, and as he related how, with a knife wound in his arm, he lay ill for a week in Van-burg's room, of his father's care, his tenderness, the boy's voice faltered and he choked back the sobs. Maria listened, her color coming and going, her bosom heaving, the tears glistening in her eyes, and, when her companion came to the parting with his father, when he had left him asleep, her sobs broke on the stillness of the day, and in an agony of feeling she threw her arms about Tito's neck.

"Ah, Tito, how couldst thou leave him so? Alone, sick, with no one to care for him! Couldst thou not see that he loved thee, that he was glad when thou camest to him? And to leave him without a word! It was cruel, cruel!"

Their cheeks were pressed together, their tears commingled, and again a guilty pang shot through the boy's heart.

Long they talked, with an earnestness and wisdom far in advance of their years, the boy, in the short time he had been absent, having acquired

TITO

the knowledge that bitter experience teaches. Maria had gained the sense of responsibility that comes from years of self-reliance, for from infancy she had been forced to rely upon her own endeavors, and hers was the wisdom of intuition that Nature teaches.

They talked long and earnestly formulating plans for the future, and the river sang to them as it did when they had listened to it in the years that had passed, the birds flying in and out of the branches over their heads, chirping and twittering derisively at the youthful lovers. As the sun descended in the west, the golden beams touched the peaks of the distant hills, turning them into flaming gold and, bursting through the purple haze, fell aslant the valley in a mellow flood of light. The breezes whispered amorously, and the shivering leaves ceased their chatter—peace, the peace of an Italian night was at hand.

And a calm joy soothed the young lovers, their hearts were as one, and, as they rose to return home, Tito pressed his lips to Maria's in a kiss as holy as lover ever gave.

"Thou wilt always love me, my Tito?"

Her eyes sought those of the boy with the frankness of her virgin thoughts.

"Always," he replied.

The last ray of sunlight touched their upturned faces in benediction.

CHAPTER XXX.

SUNDAY morning came and the sun shone with blinding brilliancy; the flower-scented air was fragrant; the birds sang as though they were never to be heard again; and all Nature rejoiced with Tito, for it was the one memorable day in the life of every Italian—the day of his first communion.

But with all the brightness a cloud seemed to hang over the boy, and he anticipated the event with distrust, with fear, with dread of some pending disaster. He did not have to search for the cause—Pietro had not returned, and it was this fact, and the dread of their meeting that, though he tried to put the thought from him, filled him with sickening terror. Yes, even terror, for he feared the wild, searching glance, the cold, steely eyes that would look into his very soul, the horrible scarred features,—the blood concentrating where the knife had left its mark.

Tito nerved himself for the encounter. Whatever the outcome of their meeting, he was determined to shield his father, yes, he would sacrifice himself, his life if need be, for his father's safety.

But as the time came for him to go to the church it was with doubt and trembling that he started, and, as he went along the dusty road, the

TITO

bright sunshine, and the birds caroling from hedge and tree, had not the power to banish his presentiment of coming evil.

The peasants in their Sunday garb were gathered about the church door. As he passed them and entered the church, dark, scowling visages greeted him, and eyes flashed looks of doubt and suspicion at the "Little Heretic."

The boy had chosen his own life, and had mapped out the course he would pursue, and, with a proud bearing, refused to notice the glances of hate, or hear the taunts, the smothered maledictions that followed him into the church.

Kneeling in one of the pews he tried to pray, but the words which the good *Parroco* had taught him became an incoherent jumble, and his confused brain was capable only of framing the words: "*Madonna*, forgive me, and save him."

Mass began, the choir singing with a religious fervor that is born in every Italian breast. After the elevation of the Host, the communicants filed up to the altar and knelt, to receive the body of Christ.

A weakness took possession of Tito, and, as he knelt before the altar rail, a mist came before his eyes, the words of the priest, as he deposited the sacred Host on the tongue of each of the communicants, buzzing in his ears—unintelligible sounds.

Gradually the priest neared the boy, and, standing before him, raised the sacred Host, repeating the words of benediction. A rapid step coming

TITO

down the centre aisle rang on the quiet of the church, and Pietro, his eyes aflame, the scar on his face standing out with threatening, disgusting prominence, grasped Tito in his powerful arms and, before the priest could deliver the sacrament, raised him to his feet. The priest stood motionless—transfixed with horror; the congregation rose to their feet, panic-stricken in their superstitious fear, which was their one dominant trait, believing that Heaven in its wrath had interposed, making the old man its instrument of vengeance.

Pietro turned the face of the boy to him,—a face that was livid, his own distorted features so close that his hot breath fanned the pallid cheek, his flaming eyes trying to read the answer to his thoughts in those of the boy, for passion choked him and it was some seconds before he could frame the words:

“Boy, hast thou kept thy vow?”

The fierce intensity of his tone was startling, his powerful voice ringing through the church, ominous, threatening, the cry of an avenging soul calling for an accounting.

Tito, though the color had left his cheek, unflinchingly met the look, and his answer came clear, his tone unfaltering:

“No.”

The old man’s face became livid.

“Come!” He hissed the words, yet they carried to the farthest corner of the church. “One of thy mother’s blood has never broken a vow.”

“Stop!” cried the priest, who had not moved

TITO

since the first interruption. Stupefied with amazement, horror, he had remained standing at the altar rail, the Host elevated in his trembling finger, "This is a sacrilege. Pietro, the curse of God will follow thee."

But Pietro was deaf, blinded by passion.

"Come," he said, and with his hand grasping Tito's arm dragged him down the centre aisle, by those, who, with wild-eyed amazement, craned their necks, regarding the boy as an emissary of the devil, whom the good Pietro had saved from eternal damnation.

Tito's face was pale, but he walked erect, and, as they neared the door, with head thrown back, his form as straight as an arrow, his confidence returned, and the spirit of his father spoke with the eloquence and the pride of his race.

Just outside the church, the boy with a quick movement freed himself, his eyes meeting those of the old man.

"If thou wouldst have me go with thee, I will go, but don't lay thy hand on me! Dost hear, Pietro? Don't!"

The old man's face relaxed. For an instant, an expression, akin to savage love, shone in his eyes, his lips trembled, and without further speech they walked quickly homeward.

Once inside the house, Pietro was the first to speak, his voice husky with suppressed emotion, his eyes fixed on the face of the boy in a yearning, lingering look,—pathetic in its wild, untamed passion.

TITO

"Have I not watched over thee, Tito, since thou wert a babe, have I not worked in the fields, denying myself all but the bit of bread and wine, and at the end of each week counting the *soldi* to see that none had been ill-spent, that thou mightest have all? And when they would cheat me, have I not fought, that I might add to the gold pieces, which shall be thine when the good God calls to me, and the end has come? Aye, it has been weary work, but the thought that thou wouldst be safe from want with the money I had saved for thee—that was a work of love! And in the fields under the hot sun, I said, 'He will think of Pietro when he feels the good gold between his fingers.' And I heeded not the work, the heat or the suffering. But I also said, 'He is of my blood—his mother's blood is of mine; he will not forget! That blood was never stained by dishonor, till this beast—this *Americano* father, thine, stole Bettina from us—Bettina with the beauty that the gods give.'"

A breath of passion swept over him, the blood mounted to his face, and, with clenched hands, his breath coming in short gasps, he leaned over the table which was between him and the boy.

"Look thou, Tito, at that scar!"

Tito raised his eyes, and shuddering looked away again,—the face was revolting, the blood-shot eyes those of a wild animal.

"He who left that scar is dead. Night and day I searched for him, never resting, tracking him from place to place, as a hound follows the trail of a wild beast, until—"

TITO

He laughed, and the blood in the boy's veins chilled,—the sound,unnatural, inhuman, dying into a chuckle of satisfaction.

"Tell me!" Again he was the Pietro, who, standing before the altar, had defied Heaven's wrath, the concentrated passion of a lifetime gleaming from his partly closed eyes, his lips quivering in his attempt at self-restraint. "Thou hast seen this father?"

"Yes," answered Tito. His voice was low, and he calmly met the glaring eyes that were fixed upon his face.

"And thou hast come back,—here, where they point at thee with scorn! Why, Tito, hast thou forgotten thy vow? Did he offer thee some of his dirty money? And the blood in thee that is his—"

"No," Tito's voice rang out clear. "No, he has naught! He is as poor as I! And he was good to me. Though he disowned me, though with his own lips he has told me he has no son, I could not—"

The old man raised his hand to signify that he had heard enough, and, rising, went to the cupboard, returning with a bottle of red wine. Pouring a goblet full he drank; again filling the glass he drained it. Seating himself at the table he turned to Tito. His features had assumed their normal aspect, but, had the boy been observant, he might have read in the eyes suppressed passion, smouldering, glowing with the flame of hate, but veiled with stolid, crafty cunning.

"Tell me," said the old man, "of thy journey,

TITO

tell me all from the time of the parting with me here."

His was an ominous calm and foreboded evil, but the boy accepted his tone of assumed indifference as a surrender to the inevitable. With a feeling of satisfaction at the old man's changed manner, Tito began a recital of his journey, hurrying over his meeting with the artist in Florence as he noted the impatience of his listener, pausing in his narrative at the old man's request to describe again and again the steamship, how he procured his passage, the cost, and every detail connected with his start from Genoa. Still no thought came to him but that he was satisfying the curiosity of his listener, who, with head bent forward, and alert ear, fixed every detail in his memory. When Tito attempted to describe the sea voyage, the old man, with an impatient wave of his hand, hurried him on to the meeting with his father, and, as he listened, when Tito's tone betrayed the affection that gave to his words a tender inflection, the eyes of his listener shot fiery gleams, his breath came in gasps, and, with trembling hand, he filled the tumbler to the brim with wine and drank it almost at one draught.

"Yes," he interjected, with impatience, "and his home! Tell me of that! What does he do? Does he work? What is his home like? Where is it? How couldst thou find it? And this place where thou didst first meet him! This café! Tell me again, for I would know this marvelous tale, that I may, sitting under a tree, over the bread and

TITO

wine at noonday, tell those who may not believe of thy father."

Again and again did Tito recount his experiences in New York, and the stolid, impenetrable expression on the old man's face never changed; even his eyes, with devilish cunning, veiled; nothing to tell the boy that the brain of the listener was aflame with murderous design.

When Tito came to the parting with his father, his voice shook with emotion, and, as he recounted the temptation to take his father's life, despite his efforts sobs broke in the quiet of the room, and his head fell on his arm that he might hide his tears.

Could he at that moment have seen Pietro's distorted features, livid with rage, the blood-red scar, a signal of disaster, standing out on his face with revolting clearness, he would have cried aloud to the good God that he might have been struck dumb before he had, by his unguardedness, placed the life he loved in jeopardy. But no guardian spirit whispered to him that, by his own words, he had pointed out to Pietro the way of vengeance, and when with moist eyes he looked up, it was only to meet the smiling face of the old man.

"And the knife, my Tito, thou hast it still?"

"Yes," answered the boy, and he placed "Micky de Pinch's" knife on the table.

The old man's bony fingers closed upon the knife.

"Oh!" he said with a sickening leer, "it is keen and the blade is good! See! my Tito, we will stick

TITO

it here—thus!” and he plunged the blade into the wooden casing of the window, half way to the hilt. “We will leave it here that we may see, and it will remind thee that thy father still lives.”

Tito remained silent. He was downcast and his heart was heavy with sorrow.

It was not alone the uncle's thirst for revenge that stirred his rage. The boy's affectionate allusion to his father, his evident sorrow and regret, when, in relating the story of their last meeting he spoke of leaving Vanburg alone, ill, with no one to care for him, revealed to the old man the boy's love. All Pietro's jealous instincts leaped to the surface, stinging him into a rage; and when he had listened to the boy speaking of his father with a yearning, pathetic tenderness, it roused him to a jealous frenzy. With the fear that the boy would discover his feelings, that he would read in his face the sinister, gloating joy that filled him, he busied himself about the fire, preparing the mid-day meal; and Tito, sitting before the door, reveled in the bright sunlight, thinking of Maria and the future of which they had talked.

Pietro called to him, and, entering the house, he found the meal prepared, consisting of a hot soup, with bread and wine.

They ate their dinner in silence. Tito gave his attention to the food, not caring to meet the glance which never left his face—but the boy felt the eyes upon him and, shifting uneasily in his chair, sought the first excuse to make his escape.

“Thou wilt go to the village,” laughed Pietro,

TITO

"to see Maria, aye, that I know. It is well, for I have much to do. To-night I must go to the fields, and I may not be here on thy return. Thou wilt find everything for thy needs in the pantry—it is well stocked. I will leave thee money, my Tito, that thou mayst want for nothing, and when thou spendest the *soldi*, thou wilt think of Pietro."

"I have money," replied Tito, quietly. "I shall want for nothing. I, too, shall work in the fields."

"Thou!" cried the old man, laughing shrilly, "work in the fields! Thou wouldst not last the day out. Work thou shalt not while old Pietro lives."

Tito did not reply.

"Tell me again of Genoa, I have never been there," said the old man innocently. "Tell me of the steamship—what is it like? I have never seen one."

Again Tito told him what he knew of the city, little dreaming what use Pietro would make of the information. Then, when the old man seemed satisfied, Tito with a promise to return early started in the direction of the village, for he had promised Maria that, after Mass was finished, they would go to the Arno and talk of their future and of America.

After Tito had gone, Pietro stood before the open door and watched him till he was lost to sight, then returned to the house.

"So the father lives!" He spoke as though he were addressing some one within hearing: "And the boy loves him! Again must he steal the love that should be mine. The boy will go back to

TITO

him—that I know, for already his heart is his,—his, and I, Pietro, who have slaved for him am as naught. I—”

Grasping the knife, he wrenched it from the casing, and a wild, inhuman laugh rang on the stillness.

“But this blade shall yet find his heart! And it shall be I who shall ask him why he stole the mother, and then the boy’s love!”

Going into an adjoining room he took from a chest a purse,—the money he was hoarding for Tito,—and, placing it in a leather belt, strapped it securely about his waist. His movements were rapid, his intention so well defined, that he went about the preparations for his journey with the thoroughness of one used to travel. The boy, when he returned, would believe that he had gone to his labor in the fields, many miles distant, and he was careful to leave no clue as to his purpose.

When all was in readiness he securely locked the house, and, leaving the key in its accustomed place where the boy could find it, started on his journey.

Tito, meanwhile, with Maria, was wandering by the banks of the river, happy as children of their age are when the sun shines, and the long summer days open to them a kingdom of their own. Yet the boy was keenly alive to the disgrace of the morning, and Maria, who was a witness to Pietro’s act, shared with him his humiliation.

“Do not mourn,” pleaded Maria. “Pietro is mad! I have heard them say as much in the vil-

TITO

lage. Now that thou hast told him all, he will forgive thee for loving thy father."

"No," he replied, "that he will not. Thou dost not know him—he never forgives. I am sorry I told him. And now—how can I stay here after what happened in the church? At my first communion! Maria, it is unlucky—they will say there is a curse upon me."

"Thou must not stay here, thou wilt go far away, and I shall go with thee, my own Tito; and together will we work in the fields, and no one will know. And we will save and save, and then shall we go to America, and perhaps—"

The boy realized what she would say. The blood mounted to his face.

"No," he said with decision, "that cannot be. My father has no son, and much as I love him, and I do love him, Maria—"

"Ah, I know it, my Tito," and two bare, plump arms stole about his neck, two lips, with the fullness of budding womanhood, were pressed to his cheek, and the boy tingled with a new-found joy.

"And I love thee the more for loving him," she continued, with the candor of childhood. And sometime I shall go to him and say: 'Dost thou know that Tito loves thee, Tito, thy son?'"

Tito threw his arms about her, and pressed his cheek to hers.

"My own Maria."

It was all he could say, for his joy was great, and the tears of happiness welled to his eyes.

The dusk of evening was with them and, hand

TITO

in hand, loitering through the fields, climbing over hedges, pausing to watch for the coming stars, they went slowly homeward, glorying in the night, and the mysteries of budding love.

When Tito reached home he found it dark.

"He has gone to his work," he mused, "for a week I shall not see him, for which I thank the good *Madonna*."

At that moment Pietro, on his mission of vengeance, was leaving Florence by the night train for Genoa.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUNDAY afternoon was the customary time for Pietro to start for the scene of his labors, it being not unusual for him to walk twenty miles or more to where he was employed; and, with the exception of the disappearance of "Micky de Pinch's" knife, there was nothing to arouse Tito's suspicions.

For the three days following the old man's departure, the boy had, except such time as he had been with Maria, remained at home, not wishing to meet those that, the past Sunday, had witnessed his disgrace. He had time to think, and his thoughts were not conducive to peace of mind. On one point he was decided—he must get away—to some city where the curse would not follow him, where, in new scenes, he could begin life anew. It was not alone this feeling that moved him, he wished to escape from the influence, the companionship of Pietro, whom he feared; and the affection, the wild, barbaric love which he lavished upon the boy awakened a feeling of repulsion, which grew into disgust. He felt a guilty shame that he could not respond to what, on the old man's part, was a yearning for love, but their natures were widely different, and the boy shrank from him in distrust.

TITO

The afternoon of the Wednesday following Pietro's departure, Tito and Maria had spent together, happy in their love, with childish enthusiasm, but with the wisdom of years, planning a future that promised a happiness which, at the moment, seemed far from them. Tito had returned home, and, with a mighty effort, was endeavoring to read an English book he had brought from America. A hurried step echoed on the walk, and Maria, her hair disheveled, breathless from having run all the way from the village, entered the house. In her excitement, before Tito could demand the cause, she grasped him by the arm as though to drag him to the door.

"Tito," she cried, her voice tremulous with fear, "thy father! Pietro has gone to America!"

She could say no more, but the terror-stricken glance which she fixed on his face spoke her fears. Tito stood transfixed—dumb with amazement. With lightning-like quickness his mind grasped her statement, her meaning. The incidents following Pietro's return to the house flashed before him—his recital of his experiences in America, the old man's desire for information, his own unguardedness, the disappearance of the knife—all now appeared to him luminously clear, and his heart sickened with dread. For some moments he was unable to speak, his brain reeled. Maria's hand clutched his arm, her eyes were riveted on his face, and she read there the train of emotions which swept over him,—remorse, fear, dread expectancy, followed by a set expression, a determi-

TITO

nation to act, and act quickly. With a brave effort she controlled herself and found voice:

"My cousin, Angelo, he who sells fruit in the great market at Florence, returned to-night. He has had trouble with Pietro, and they do not speak to each other. Sunday night in the station at Florence he was waiting for Michael, who works for him. There he saw Pietro buying a ticket for Genoa, and he was inquiring when the steamship sailed for America."

She paused, breathless, her eyes, wild in their expression, fixed on the boy's face, her attitude that of one ready to act, to start at once for America to save the father from Pietro's knife.

Tito's mind, with lightning speed, was planning the course he would pursue, yet when he realized that Pietro was in possession of all the information necessary, that he had a start of three days and was well on his journey, for an instant panic seized him. But it quickly passed, and his decision came without hesitation, his words rapidly, determination in his voice and stamped on every line of his features.

"Maria, I shall go. There is a quicker way than by Genoa. By Paris and England, from where the boats go quickly. This they told me on the ship that brought me from America. The good doctor in the village will tell me more. I have money," said the boy, "the money which the good friends in America gave to me; Pietro left me more, for which I thank the good *Madonna*, who will guide me, and"—his voice trembled—"protect the father

TITO

whom I love. Come, Maria, we will go to the church, and there will we pray to the good God—I have learned the words. Then will I talk to the kind doctor, who will tell me more. Come.”

Together, hand in hand, they entered the church, and kneeling in the darkness, in their simple way asked Heaven to guide them, and to preserve him whose life they would save.

Leaving the church with a feeling of calm, a new-born confidence, they parted at the door, Maria hurrying away to make preparations for his journey, while Tito went to the home of the village doctor to learn what he could to forward him on his mission.

The doctor, learning of Pietro’s purpose, and the boy’s determination to save his father, entered into minute details, and Tito, after fervently thanking him, hurried away with the confidence that knowledge brings.

Two hours later they were at the station, Maria’s head resting on the boy’s shoulder, his arm around her, breathing words of encouragement into her ears to check the tears that streamed down her sun-tanned cheeks. The train lazily came to a halt; a parting embrace, and Tito had begun his journey.

The train rumbled on in true Italian fashion, stopping at every station, whizzing and puffing. Noisy, revelous countrymen, conscripts in the first intoxication of enforced patriotic fervor, super-induced by much native wine, filled the carriages, and our youthful traveler, his mind dwelling on his

TITO

race with death, sat silent in a corner of the compartment.

But a continental soldier, recently recruited, filled in anticipation with the exuberance of forthcoming glory and an over-supply of native wine is, like an unbroken colt of indifferent blood, an unpleasant creature if judged at short range. Tito incited in one of this class a prolonged stare, then a drunken smirk, and finally the words:

"Young one, art thou, too, going to be a soldier? Thou art much too pretty! Thy cherub face was not meant to be burned with powder."

It was now Tito's turn to stare; he improved the opportunity. But an ominous scowl should have warned the newly made warrior to desist. The soldier's eyes, however, were bleared by drink, and he did not note the threatening attitude of the boy who sat facing him or, if he did, refused to seriously consider him.

"Come, stand up, that I may look at thee. I may yet be thy superior officer. It will then be thy duty to clean my boots."

He attempted to lay his hands on Tito to enforce his command, but the boy pushed him back into his seat.

"You are drunk!" Tito held rein on his temper.

"What now," jeered the conscript. "Thy temper needs curbing! Thou beardless little brat, thou art old enough to learn to obey thy superiors. I will teach thee."

Again he partly rose, but Tito's clenched fist shot out and, with a smothered oath, the fellow fell

TITO

back into his seat. His companions, more sober than he, restrained him, and for the time being hostilities were at an end.

"You can strike well," said the conscript, as they neared Florence, but you must learn to respect a future commissioned officer—the stripes I will yet earn."

"Yes," answered Tito blandly, "in the cook's scullery. You were born to do battle in a kitchen. The smell of powder would sicken you with fear."

"Thy tongue is in need of a pair of shears," quoth the wit.

"So are your ears, they are the stamp of your breed—that of an ass."

Tito smiled sweetly; the soldiers roared at their comrade's discomfiture. Apparently Tito was in command of the field.

"Young one, I'll pull thy nose for thee," cried the warrior with rising anger.

"Do," came the quick reply, "if it will kill the scent of your breath. It reeks with garlic and wine that is too foul to sell. Ach!"

This was too much and the offender made an attempt to rise, but his companions grasped him by the arms and forced him back into his seat.

The train pulled into the station at Florence and the boy alighted.

Here fortune favored him, and with only a few minutes' delay, which gave him opportunity to purchase food, he was rushing northward, over rolling plain, through village and city, the grinding, snorting engine, with a giant's power, mount-

TITO

ing the foothills of the Alps:—through tunnels and over mountain passes, flying over bridges spanning deep ravines, till the fair plains of sunny France welcomed him.

Counting the time since Pietro's departure, the boy added each succeeding hour to the three days before he discovered his uncle had gone. Did the train stop at a station but for a few minutes, he fretted under the enforced delay, and it seemed to the impatient traveler as if the combined forces of nature, and machinations such as human ingenuity could devise, were in league to retard his progress. But at last the train reached Paris, and, though he marveled at the beauty of such part of the city as he passed through, he lost no time, but hurried on to the Guard du Nord on his way to London.

Again he rushed on, eating where opportunity presented, sleeping in the corner of the railway carriage, for the greater part of the time silent, thoughtful, only when, for the hundredth time, he counted the days and the hours, speculating upon the possibility of catching a fast steamer that was to sail from Liverpool the following day.

Many were the looks of admiration that were directed toward him, for the boy's self-reliant, sturdy manliness, aroused the interest of those that he encountered. But he was unconscious of all but the passing time; his thoughts not of himself but of Pietro, speeding across the ocean, and of the father who was forever waiting his son's return.

London at last, where he procured a third-class

TITO

ticket and, within the hour, he was on his way again, this time for Liverpool, and one of the fastest steamships that crosses the ocean.

The following morning found him aboard. The customary bustle, a jargon of all kinds—stewards, deck-hands, the officers of the steamer, and representatives of all the nationalities of the continent, mixed promiscuously; yet out of it all a marvelous degree of systematic order, and the steamer headed for Queenstown. Here came another delay, and it was only after the steamer had left the harbor and lay her course due west that Tito suppressed his impatience and settled himself comfortably for the journey.

But he had not been idle. He sought knowledge and, realizing the power of a generous tip, before the land disappeared the head steward was supplying him with information.

"I shall arrive in New York," he mused, "the same day as Pietro—perhaps before. He goes by a much longer route, and the ship he is on is of slow speed. Heaven grant that I may," he added fervently.

Each day the boy deducted the number of knots the ship had made from the distance that separated him from his journey's end; and each night, when quiet reigned, he stole on deck, and, in a secluded part of the ship, prayed to the *Madonna* to guard him that he might be on time, and that the good God soften the heart of Pietro and turn him from his vengeance. And a great peace came to him, filling his heart to overflowing, and as the days

TITO

went by, and the ship drew nearer the land, he saw new beauties in the sea, and at night the wonders of the starlit heavens spoke to him of a wonderful, unseen power that guides the destinies of the world; and of a morning, with the bright sunlight dancing on harbor and river, he arrived at New York.

The hours of waiting until he could land seemed ages. His impatience grew with the day, but in the late afternoon he was hurrying up town in the direction of Vanburg's lodgings. But here he met his first disappointment—Vanburg, although still retaining his room, had not slept there for several weeks, and he could learn nothing as to where he could be found or when he would return.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KNOWING where McGlennon lived, after having visited Death House Joe's, and failing to obtain any information that would guide him in his search, Tito decided to go to the home of the Scotchman, in the hope that he might learn where Vanburg could be found.

But McGlennon, after he had sought him out at the docks, could tell him nothing. He had not seen Vanburg for more than a week, for he had not done any work in that length of time, and though the Scotchman had searched for him at his usual haunts, no one knew of his whereabouts.

McGlennon was overjoyed to see the boy, and, as it was near the noon hour, he prevailed on Tito to accompany him to a cheap restaurant where, when the meal was finished, the boy listened while his companion spoke of his father, and of his sorrow when his son had left him.

"I tell you, boy, for a week after you had gone, the man was mad, aye, crazed with grief. Day and night I stayed with him, for he would not eat, he could not sleep; and he tramped about the city—looking for you always. At the end of a week I called in a physician and we put him under the influence of an opiate—by that time the man was daft, clean daft. We made him sleep for two days,

TITO

but since then he is not the same. The life is gone out of him, and he thinks and talks only of you. Find him, Tito, for if you do not—”

“I shall find him,” said the boy in a confident tone. “I shall find him, for the good *Madonna* has so willed it, and,” he added musingly, “he still thinks of the ‘Little Devil?’ ”

“Think of you!” repeated McGlennon, “boy, it is not for me to say, but I know the story of the picture, and he seeks you—day and night, night and day; and should he not find you, death will come quickly.”

The boy listened, his eyes aglow, his cheeks flushed, drinking in the words, eager to spring to his feet and renew his search.

“If it be the will of the *Madonna* that thou shouldst see him before I, wilt thou ask of him this favor? Say to him it is I, Tito, who ask it:—that he will not go to his room, or to Joe’s, until I have seen him.”

“What is wrong?” asked McGlennon.

“That I cannot tell thee,” answered Tito, “not now, but thou shalt know after I have seen him. Tell him it is all I ask of him, and tell him that—that I love him.”

His tones were husky and McGlennon, with a father’s instinct, noting the boy’s emotion, remained silent. He thought of his own child, her pathetic devotion in the ill-spent years that had passed, and the memories sent a wave of tenderness through heart and brain. His eyes moistened and he addressed the boy with added gentleness:

TITO

"Poor Tito! I realize what you feel. Find him, boy, for his life depends on your success. Come, it is time for me to return to work. To-night I shall see you again?"

"Yes. Should I be detained, thou wilt know that I still seek him."

For three days and three nights he continued his search, but he could find no trace of Vanburg. He had but little money left and, with what remained, he paid for a week's lodgings in advance. He must, at least during the day, find something to do to earn sufficient for his needs, yet, though his money was gone he had no fear, for should he fail to find work, though the thought was repugnant to him, he would again sing the silver pieces out of the pockets of his countrymen, for he knew where an affectionate welcome awaited him.

Day and night he visited Vanburg's lodgings and the resorts where he would be most likely to find him, but failure constantly awaited his efforts. Discouraged, he would return to the cheap lodging-house where he slept, refusing McGlennon's hospitality, and the fourth night of his fruitless search he went to bed weary and disheartened.

But the following morning, good fortune guided his steps toward Vanburg's squalid room. As he neared the building Pietro was descending the steps, and paused on the sidewalk before the entrance.

Tito was on the opposite side of the street some

TITO

distance away, and recognizing his granduncle, quickly entered a hallway, the door of which was open. He argued, and with sound reasoning, that should the old man discover that he was in the country, the knowledge would drive him into a frenzy. The thought of what the result might have been, had Pietro been successful in finding Vanburg, for an instant filled him with terror; and he blamed himself for not having kept a closer watch.

Pietro stood on the pavement for some moments, apparently uncertain what course to pursue, then walked rapidly in the direction of the Bowery. Hurrying across the street, the boy dashed up the stairs and knocked at the door of Vanburg's room. There came no reply and he pushed the door open. No one was within and, with a lighter heart, he quickly descended to the street with the hope of overtaking Pietro; but his uncle had disappeared, and Tito resumed his weary search.

Noonday found him tired and hungry, but he trudged wearily on. He had eaten nothing since the night before, and he paused at a street corner to consider his prospects.

"I am very hungry," he mused. "Tito, once thou couldst sing. Think thou of a hot dinner and a glass of wine—the wine of thy own *Italia*, and perhaps thy voice will return. But I cannot sing as I once could, aye, that I know; and if I fail, they will say: 'Little Devil,' come not again till thou hast found thy voice. Ah, the world is all alike.

TITO

You must give double worth for what it is pleased to grant to you. But if I eat, then must I sing. I like it not, but the hot soup—the soup I must have.”

Wearily he turned his steps in the direction of the café in the Italian quarter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AS McGlennon had told the boy, the week following Tito's sudden departure had been to Vanburg a week bordering on madness. He could neither sleep nor eat. Drink had lost its power to deaden the torture that each day increased as his search for Tito grew more and more hopeless, turning his nights into a living, sleepless agony. He grew morose, sullen, his nerves were on edge, his wildly staring eyes indicating that he had reached the danger point, and that sleep alone would save him from the madness that wakefulness and thoughts of the boy would surely bring. It was when he had reached this stage, that McGlennon, without his consent or knowledge, called in a physician and, under the influence of powerful opiates, he was kept quiet for two days and nights.

Weak, but in a calmer state, he again took up his search, daily visiting the Italian quarter, believing Tito to be still in the city, trusting to chance to meet him at some of the cafés that he knew the boy was in the habit of visiting.

At the resort where Tito and Ned Hollander had met, the proprietor had talked to him of the boy, telling of his marvelous voice, and of his guests who daily inquired for the young singer. So each day found Vanburg seated in the rear of

TITO

the café, hoping always that Tito would again renew his visits, trusting to chance to assist him in his life mission—to find the boy.

With the hope that he would return, Vanburg still retained the room where Tito had visited him, though he seldom went there. In the solitude of the night he seemed to hear the boy's voice speaking to him; the echo of his songs rang on the stillness; and on wall and ceiling he could read the words, the memento that Tito had left behind: "She who painted this portrait was my mother."

The very quiet of the place seemed to woo madness, and as the days and the weeks went by, so grew his dislike and fear, and he spent his time roaming about the city or passing the night at some cheap hotel.

Often his hopes were momentarily raised when, in a crowd, he would see some boy that, in his excited state, he believed to be Tito. Then would begin a chase, at times lasting the distance of several blocks, his heart beating with expectancy, his fevered imagination endowing some stranger with the face and the form of the one he sought; but for the hundredth time he met only disappointment, to be followed by still deeper dejection.

Rarely he ate breakfast, but each day, before the place became crowded, that he might not miss Tito should he return, he went to the café where the boy had sung, drinking a glass of wine before ordering lunch, waiting a full hour or longer in the hope that the boy would return.

Late in the morning of the day when Tito, hav-

TITO

ing reached the end of his resources, decided to visit the café, Vanburg was irresistibly drawn to his old lodgings, with the hope that in his absence the boy might have returned. Many times he had gone there on the same errand, only to find that his mind, in its abnormal condition, his fevered brain, his overwrought emotions, were playing him fantastic tricks—leading him a siren's dance.

Mounting the steps to the outer door he stopped abruptly. "Good God!" he muttered, "I cannot face the emptiness of that room."

As quickly as he had come he turned away.

"He is not here! He will never come again. Sometime he will return to the café. I will wait there for years if need be."

With quick, nervous stride, he turned west, closely followed by Pietro who, day and night since he had arrived in the country had been watching for him.

Though Vanburg's beard completely disguised his face, the compact form and springing step were all that was needed to assure Pietro that his watching and waiting were at last rewarded; and when Vanburg turned from the door the Italian's features lighted up with unholy joy.

There was no danger that Vanburg would recognize him for, during his life in Italy, he had seen the old man but a few times, and notwithstanding the scar, which once seen could not be easily forgotten, the memory of Pietro was long since dead.

Gradually the Italian gained on him, his eyes

TITO

glowing with satisfaction, his hate turned to joy; and when Vanburg went into the café he was almost instantly followed by the Italian. Upon entering he lingered near the door, to allow Vanburg time to choose a seat which, as was his custom, he selected at the far end of the room.

Slowly and with an air of indifference, Pietro seated himself at an adjoining table between his victim and the entrance. Ordering wine, he drained the glass at a draught, and pushing it to the waiter, ordered more.

Vanburg had not noticed the old man—his eyes were on the door, for the patrons, well-to-do Italians, with a sprinkling of Americans who were fond of Italian dishes, were coming in numbers, and the places at the tables were being rapidly filled.

Again and again did Pietro drink, then rising, took a seat at Vanburg's table, facing him.

"Hast thou forgotten Bettina?" asked the old man abruptly.

Vanburg, with a start, turned his eyes to the speaker, whose face was in the shadow. Startled at the interruption he did not reply, but fixing his glance on the man before him, looked into the eyes in which hate was tempered by fierce, vindictive joy.

"And the child thou hast always believed dead, but that lived to hate thee—Bettina's child!"

Again the old man paused, and still Vanburg remained silent. Not a muscle of his features moved. His eyes, fixed, staring, never left the

TITO

ugly face; only his deep, irregular breathing told that he was moved, that the old man's words filled him with terror—terror that came with the belief that his reason was crumbling, that what he heard was a return of the nights when, alone in his room, fantasies, waking dreams and visions haunted him.

"*Mio Dio*," he muttered in Italian, instinctively dropping into the language which the old man spoke, "is this a repetition of what I have gone through in another form? Now, someone, whom I have never before seen, talks to me of Bettina and the boy!"

"With thy marriage vow there was another oath recorded—that thou shouldst suffer for having stolen her from us. Canst thou remember the night when thou didst return from Paris? She was dying—our Bettina! She forgot that we lived and, day and night, when she was conscious, she called for thee. Then thou camest and we told thee the child was dead."

A low chuckle followed the words. Pietro bent forward over the table. Gradually his passion was awakening, his face had become livid—only the scar, like a splash of fresh blood, stood out prominently. Still Vanburg remained silent. His was an ominous calm—the calm of feelings held in restraint, of a mind the sanity of which is being stretched to the danger point.

A pause ensued after Pietro had finished speaking—the old man noting the effect of his words.

"Say," said Vanburg, never removing his glance from the face before him, "are you some fiend in

TITO

the embodiment of flesh that hell has sent to torment me?"

"Yes," answered Pietro, "that am I." His right hand toyed with the handle of the knife in the pocket of his coat. "And thou hast seen thy son, thine and Bettina's—Tito. And for a night prayer he curses thee."

Again came the low, chuckling laugh. His eyes flashed gleams of hate, but his listener did not see, for Pietro's growing passion carried no impression to his mind. Sitting inert, motionless, Vanburg heard the words as if they were echoes of past years.

Pietro beckoned to the waiter to fill his glass and, until he returned, sat silent, his eyes fixed on Vanburg's face.

Tito had entered the café. Standing near the door, he was met with a roar of welcome, and a flush of pleasure mounted to his cheeks.

"Ah, they have not forgotten me!"

"Forgotten thee, 'Little Devil,'"—it was the proprietor who spoke, "forgotten thee! Each day have my guests asked me, 'Where is Tito?' and always I have replied: 'He will come to-morrow.' It has been long since thou wert here. If thou wilt come each day and sing, thou canst name any price that I am able to pay, and it shall be thine. What sayest thou?"

"Wait," said the boy, "perhaps I have forgotten."

"Drink this," urged the proprietor, noting the

TITO

drawn look on the boy's face, "thou art tired. It is Madeira, and of my private stock."

The boy drank, then indicated the musicians with a nod of his head.

"Tell them to play the songs of *Italia*," he said.

In the rear of the room, Pietro was saying to the man who heard and did not understand, for he sat as one in a stupor—"And thy son grew—grew to hate thee, his own father, and he had sworn that before he received his first communion, thy life would answer for the dead Bettina's."

His hand grasped the hilt of the knife, and trembling with passion, he leaned across the table.

The first note from the orchestra struck upon their hearing,—soft, pathetic, ending in a full, harmonious chord.

"But thy dirty blood," hissed Pietro, half rising, "made a coward of him, and it was left for me—"

Tito's voice rang out full and clear, in a song that, times unnumbered, had thrilled Pietro to his finger tips. A look of doubt, consternation, terror, swept across the old man's features; the fingers that held the knife relaxed, his hand fell to his side and, forgetting his purpose, he turned slowly round. Grasping the back of his chair, he glared at the singer, at first believing him to be an apparition then, as though the boy's purpose were divined by him, with a cry of a wounded beast he sank into his seat.

Vanburg, at the first sound of the voice, had sprung to his feet, joy leaping to his heart, transforming his features, lighting up his eyes with their

TITO

old-time fire, and in appearance, it seemed as if ten years had been shorn from his life. Above the music and Pietro's despairing cry his voice rang out:

"Tito!"

The song ceased. Quickly the boy came, for only death would he have paused.

"My father!" It was his heart that spoke, but the words, like a knife thrust, struck, knell-like, upon the ears of Pietro, chanting the death of his last hope.

The boy would look upon him with hate, with loathing; and the love he craved, the love he had waited for through the years since he had held him in his arms as a babe, was for the man who had robbed them of Bettina. With the cry of an enraged animal he was on his feet, the knife flashing above his head, his features distorted with passion.

He sprang towards Vanburg who, unconscious of his danger, with eyes fixed on the boy, ready to embrace him, paid no heed to the old man.

Not so Tito. Seeing the gleam of the steel, recognizing Pietro's cry, while the knife was yet uplifted, with a catlike spring he threw himself upon the old man, winding his arms about his neck. Fear, love for his father, lent him strength; and the Italian, trying to shake him off, made a lunge at Vanburg as he sprang to the boy's assistance. But the blow fell short—the blade penetrating Tito's clothing.

"Pietro," cried the boy, "Pietro, thou shalt not

TITO

harm him! Kill me, Pietro! He is my father and I love him."

With an oath he threw the boy from him. Again he raised the knife and, like a flash, it found his own heart, buried to the hilt, and he fell forward on the table,—dead.

Consternation reigned, but no hand could interpose, for it had been a matter of only a few seconds from the time Tito had sprung between Vanburg and the enraged Italian.

They laid him on the floor, his face horrible to look at; the eyes glaring, the blood-red scar standing out with revolting clearness.

"Tito," said Vanburg tenderly, with his arm about the boy, "my son, my own Tito, twice hast thou risked thy life for me. Thou wilt not leave me again, my Tito."

"No," answered the boy. He could say no more.

Ned Hollander, who had entered the café as Tito had ceased singing, held out his hand which Vanburg grasped.

"Vannie, even in the presence of a tragedy, I am glad to see you. And Tito! Tell me what it all means, Van."

"The boy is my son," answered Vanburg.

For a moment Hollander looked at him in amazement.

"Then say no more, Vannie, take the boy and go away. It is no place for him. I will attend to everything. Is he—that on the floor—"

"He is the boy's granduncle."

TITO

"That's enough," Hollander replied. "Leave everything to me. By the way, where can I find you?"

Vanburg wrote his address on a card. It was the lodging-room where Tito had visited him.

"You will find me at this address," he said, handing the card to Hollander. "If there is anything I can do—"

"No. I will attend to everything. Go with the boy."

Together Tito and his father went out. They did not speak for some minutes, for the tragedy had made a deep impression on the boy, and his dislike and fear of Pietro had, when he had seen him dead on the floor, turned into a great pity, and the ready tears glistened on his eyelashes.

"Tito," spoke his father, "it was Pietro who gave me the final proof that thou art my son. When I said to thee that I had no son, Tito, it was because they had told me thou wert dead—with thy mother."

"I knew that thou couldst do no wrong," said the boy gently. "But when thou hadst said thou hadst no son—"

"Ah, my boy, I can judge what thy feelings were. But that time has past, as, thank God, has the old life. From to-day thy father begins life anew. We will bid goodby to the days of sorrow, but we will not forget, for did they not give to me my son?"

Together they entered the room that to Vanburg had been the scene of much suffering; but

TITO

now a holy joy filled both heart and mind to completeness. Whatever degradation the past years had brought to him, whatever of sorrow, shame, humiliation, was forgotten in this great moment of happiness. Pride, the light of filial love, flashed from his eyes, transforming his face until line and wrinkle disappeared, and in lightness of heart, he seemed the Vanburg of fifteen years before. His step was elastic, his voice cheery, and he set about putting the room in condition, demanding of the boy, meantime, what he could do to add to his comfort.

And Tito—it was as though he had returned to his home after a long absence; for it was here, in this room, barren and cheerless, that the first kindness, the first tenderness, that had ever entered his young life, had given birth to a love that now made his heart overflow. Watching his father move about the room with lithe, springing step, as, to add a touch of comfort and homelikeness, he covered the rickety table with a newspaper, the boy laughed gleefully. His father smiled and shook his finger at him.

“You shall remain here, my Tito, while I fetch the necessaries for a banquet—for to-day we feast.”

Tito’s laugh followed the sound of his father’s footsteps down the stairs.

When he was alone, the boy walked about the room. What happiness was his, what youthful, delirious joy! The wealth of all the world could not furnish such. True, they were poor, this won-

TITO

derful father and he, but what of that! Were they not strong? And they could work! And this barren, cheerless room was grander to him than any of the palaces of his own *Italia*. *Italia*—yes, he and his father would return to his own country, and he would be an artist—as his mother had been. And he would sing, and with the money—

The entrance of Vanburg interrupted his castle-building, and together they ate of the abundance his father had procured.

"To-day, my son, is the beginning of a new life. No more dissipation, no more of Death House Joe's, no more of the hopeless nights of misery. To-day nothing but thanksgiving, then work, yes, work—the harder the better,—and a determination to succeed, that my boy, my Tito, may have a future. Think thou that thy father is too old to begin all over, to conquer in the new life that begins to-day?"

"Old!" was Tito's scoffing reply. "Did I not see thee stand before the thieves? And how they fell before thy blows! And I, too, shall work. I shall paint as my mother did, and I shall be great,—the good artist in dear Florence has so told me."

At the mention of his mother a soft light stole into Vanburg's eyes; rising, he laid his hand gently on his son's head, and pressed his cheek to the boy's, which glowed with the warmth of his young blood. Drawing from his pocket Bettina's portrait of the *Madonna*, he held it so that the light fell upon the painting. Neither spoke, but Tito took it reverently in his hand and touched the canvas

TITO

with his lips. With a sigh Vanburg placed it on the mantel, then together they talked of the future.

The father, firm in the belief that Tito would understand, told him of his grandfather, of the cause that prompted him to voluntarily relinquish his position in life, of the breath of suspicion that had been cast upon his honor, of his father's regret when he discovered the wrong he had done him, and his many attempts to affect a reconciliation. Then, in a voice that faltered, he continued:

"I cannot return and resume the position in life that was mine, but thy grandfather would welcome my son, my Tito—"

"Without *thee*?"

Tito sprang to his feet. The look he cast at his father was one of sorrowful reproach.

"Dost thou," he exclaimed with a stifled sob, "think so poorly of the 'Little Devil?'"

There was a touch of bitterness in the tone; accusation in the eyes that met his father's.

"I am thinking only of thy future," his father replied, but his heart leaped with new-found delight, and he drew the boy gently to him. Tito did not speak, for, though his father thought only of what would be best for him, the boy was deeply pained. For a few moments the only sound was of someone mounting the stairs with unsteady step that halted on the landing. A short pause was followed by a rap on the door.

"Come in," called Vanburg.

He did not move from his seat, but, with his arm around Tito, awaited the entrance of their visitor.

TITO

Slowly the door opened, and the tall, stately figure of the elder Vanburg appeared in the aperture. He stood motionless for several seconds to accustom his eyes to the dim light within, then entered the room and softly closed the door behind him. He looked what he was, the born aristocrat. His hair was snow-white: his face almost livid in its pallor. The eyes were sunken, but, as he recognized his son, they took on an expression that was pathetic. Notwithstanding his years, his form was erect, the poise of the head proclaiming the pride of the Vanburg race—an unconscious haughtiness which, even in Tito, was wont to make Mother Malenotti rage. With outstretched hand he took a step toward his son, and the movement, the gesture, spoke more eloquently in supplication, regret, than could mortal tongue.

His son's heart was filled with a great pity and, releasing Tito, he strode to his father's side, grasping the outstretched hand in his own. Neither spoke, but the son looked into the moist eyes that mutely voiced the old man's appeal.

Ten years had passed since father and son had seen each other, years that for them had been filled with misery and heartache; for each, in his own way, had experienced all the pangs that loneliness and loveless years had the power to give. And now, after the years of misunderstanding, of useless regrets, of unavailing remorse, and pride that had been crushed and humbled by suffering, they met in this squalid room. What a conflict of emotion was theirs! The moist eye, the trembling

TITO

lip, the husky voice, the faltering words they could not utter—sorrow, repentance, love, struggling to find expression that only a grasp of the hand and an embrace could voice, followed by a sob from the old man as, with his hand in that of his son, he stood trembling, his eyes pleading for the forgiveness that he dare not ask.

And the son? Perhaps the regret that surged through heart and brain as he waited for his father to speak, in a measure wiped out the years of folly; and, as he noted the lines and the furrows that time had added to the wrinkled face, a sense of shame and of sorrow swept over him. But the years could not be recalled. Time had left its imprint on their lives as it had on their features. The past was dead; the future held out hope that good would come when the scars had healed.

Tito had remained standing, his eyes, glistening with sympathetic tears, riveted on the face of his grandfather. Mingled awe and pride was in the look; but the boy was quite sure that he would be fond of the stately old man who appeared to love his father dearly, and this, the boy mentally affirmed, proved him worthy of his, Tito's, distinguished consideration. He wanted to embrace his grandfather and waited quietly until he would be noticed.

"Father," said the younger Vanburg in a tender voice, "there is one whose love will, I trust, atone for my errors, one whom you will love,—my son Tito."

TITO

The boy came quickly, his hands extended to his grandfather.

The old man held him close, his smile, his embrace, all that was needed to seal the compact of love; and from that instant Tito paid homage to his stately grandfather, "who," he later confided to his father, "would be a duke in his own *Italia*."

Long and earnestly they talked: —the elder Vanburg pleading for his son's return; the son firm in his resolve to begin anew the battle of life, to earn a position by his own effort.

"I have destroyed," he said, regret in his tones, "whatever claim I once possessed to recognition. My son agrees with me—we must carve out our own destiny. The world that I knew has forgotten me, why should I demand of it to remember that I once lived?"

"But your son, Horace?"

"It is his right to choose. I have explained all to him. He will cast his lot with mine."

Tears glistened in the old man's eyes, and the look he directed at Tito was of pathetic entreaty.

After a moment's silence Vanburg asked:

"How did you discover my address?"

"From young Hollander," his father replied. "He and his sister came with me. They are waiting below, in the carriage."

Vanburg flushed. "I will speak to them," he said, and went out.

"Tito, my boy, come to me."

The old man's trembling hands were outstretched, and Tito sprang to his embrace. Before

TITO

his son the elder Vanburg had controlled his feelings, but, alone with the boy, his enforced calm gave place to a flood of emotion, and with his arms about Tito, tears, that he made no effort to repress, ran down his withered cheek. No longer was he the banker, the rich aristocrat, the representative of ancestors whose arrogant pride was their dominant characteristic. He was again a child, and Tito's heart responded to his appeal for pity, for sympathy, for love—his tears mingling with those of his grandfather as, with the withered cheek pressed to his own, he made a manly effort to control his emotion.

"Tito, boy," pleaded his grandfather, "I am an old man. But few years remain for me. You love your father?"

"Ah, yes," came the quick reply.

"Think, then, of what your life would be should you lose him."

The terror of the thought shone in Tito's eyes.

"Will you then think of me, Tito, of my lonely life? Will you remember your grandfather in a great house, lonely, sorrowful, waiting through the years for his son's return? You could love me, boy?"

"Ah," exclaimed Tito with warmth, "already I love thee."

"Will you plead with your father for me, Tito? Will you remember the father who is always waiting, watching, for him? Ah, boy, I can read in your eyes nothing but love, but gentleness. In your face I can see the character of the Vanburg

TITO

race, but your beauty, the tenderness in those eyes are your mother's. Remember her, boy, and be kind to your grandfather, who will love you as she would have loved you."

It needed but the mention of his mother and Tito surrendered, his heart going out without condition or reservation to his grandfather.

"Trust me," said Tito, "I promise he will come to thee."

In an excess of feeling, even of elation, the old man embraced him. Then as Vanburg returned, the glance that they exchanged sealed their compact.

"I will trust all to you, Tito," whispered his grandfather.

"I will keep my promise," was the reply.

After an affectionate leave-taking, a whispered word to Tito as he embraced him, the elder Vanburg departed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AFTER his father was gone Vanburg was depressed. He could not entertain the thought of a return to the home that he had left, but none knew better than he that he owed a duty to his son. He accused himself of selfishness in wishing to keep Tito with him, for he knew that his son, should he go to his grandfather, would receive every advantage that money could procure. But he was human, and the thought of a separation from the boy he could not entertain.

Tito, meanwhile, was planning his line of attack. His quickly changing moods caused his father to smile, but he could not quite understand him. He was now tender, again jubilant, humming the bar of an Italian song, only to stop suddenly and demand of his father to recite again and again their plans of the future. His diplomacy was not deep. Suddenly he stood before his father.

"I think I shall love my grandpapa!" he said.
"He is very nice!"

Vanburg looked into the flushed face.

"Would you like to live with him?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Tito, promptly.

The answer struck upon Vanburg's ear like a knell. The words sank into his heart. He had found his son only to lose him.

TITO

"If you wish it, Tito, you shall live with him."
Vanburg steadied his voice with an effort.

"Aye, true," answered the boy, "but it shall be when my father comes with me. If thou hadst waited through the years for thy Tito, the 'Little Devil,' and thou hadst begged him to come to thee, and he had answered 'no,' what wouldst thy heart have said? And if thou wert old and alone, sorrowful, waiting for thy Tito to return, think of thy feelings when he would come to thee and say: 'Yes, it is I, Tito, who has come back to thee,' for it is that thou hast said to me when thou wert ill and I came here. And thou wert glad that the 'Little Devil' had not forgotten thee. Dost thou remember?"

"Remember, boy? Yes, ah God, yes!"

"It is thus that my grandpapa feels while he watches and waits for thee. Even now he may be sitting at the window, watching each one that passes, saying: 'He will come, I know he will come,' and when thou had gone to see thy friends, and we were alone, what thinkest thou he said?"

Vanburg's only reply was a glance into the pleading eyes.

"That though I was of his race, I had the beauty of my mother—her eyes, her—her tenderness.' Ah, for that did I love him. And when thou didst tell me that thou hadst no son, and I ran away that I might not fulfil the vow I had made, because I loved thee, canst thou know the sorrow and the shame that was mine? And I

TITO

prayed to the *Madonna* to give the 'Little Devil' a new heart and to save thee."

Grasping his father's hand in both his own, he continued passionately:

"Come, come to my grandfather, he is waiting for us, and he will be glad as thou wert when thy Tito, the 'Little Devil,' came back to thee. Come."

Without a word Vanburg took his hat, that lay on the table, and taking the portrait from its place on the mantel, he put it in his pocket and they went out; not, however, before Tito had flashed a last look of mingled regret and joy about the barren room that he loved so well.

Slowly they walked on, Vanburg silent and thoughtful, Tito, in his anxiety to hasten, keeping a pace or two in advance of his father.

After more than an hour's walk they turned from the avenue—Vanburg indicating, with a nod of his head, the house that would be Tito's future home.

"See," said Tito, excitedly, "is it not as I told thee? My grandfather is at the window waiting for us." Then with the utmost nonchalance: "I told him we would come."

Vanburg smiled.

"You young rascal," he replied, "I am glad you did."

They mounted the flight of stone steps quickly, but before they could ring the bell the door swung open and they entered.

The hours go by, and from the servants' quar-

TITO

ters below, to the top of the house, lights blaze through the windows. A carriage stops before the door and Madge Hollander and her brother alight and enter. Through the uncurtained window we can see the elder Vanburg talking with Ned Hollander, who had been an active accomplice in arranging the meeting between father and son. Tito is standing in the rear of the room smiling and happy, beside him his father and Madge—on their features the contentment of perfect love.

The night shadows deepen. Across the face of the refulgent moon—like fragments of a disrupted kingdom of the clouds—float seas of shimmering splendor, the veiled stars piercing their misty depths with shafts of mellow light. Phantom sail, unrigged, unmanned, sweep past the mystic islands of the night, the foam-lashed cloud-waves touching their virgin peaks. Hurlled from their awful height the wrecks of worlds plunge downward—down through vales of death, through never ending space into the realm of the Unknown.

They are gone—the limpid rays of the chiding moon following the receding hosts. Slowly the shadows lift, melting away before the glory of the star-lit heavens: the sighing breezes of the night whispering their secrets until the imagination is aflame with the mysteries of an unpeopled world.

Thus do lights and shadows flit across our lives. Without, the heart of Man throbs responsive to a settled calm. Into the lives of those we are leaving has come the glory of the wondrous night.

THE END.

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